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## COMMUNICATION STRATEGY IN AN NGO

KOMUNIKAČNÍ STRATEGIE NEZISKOVÉ ORGANIZACE

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE  
MASTER'S THESIS

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## **Abstract**

The subject of this Master's thesis is refinement of the communication strategy of the biggest European student organisation—Erasmus Student Network AISBL.

The thesis defines the status quo of the organisation and based upon its analysis it proposes an approach of creating content strategy from the point of view of the target groups (by creating personas), leading to strengthening the engagement and clarifying content targeting for individual communication channels.

## **Keywords**

Communication strategy, content strategy, marketing communications, personas

## **Abstrakt**

Předmětem diplomové práce je zpřesnění komunikační strategie největší evropské studentské organizace—Erasmus Student Network AISBL.

Práce definuje status quo organizace a po jeho analýze navrhuje způsob, jakým lze díky tvorbě obsahové strategie z pohledu cílového uživatele (tvorbou person) zvýšit zásah a zlepšit cílení obsahu pro jednotlivé komunikační kanály.

## **Klíčová slova**

Komunikační strategie, obsahová strategie, marketingová komunikace, persony



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Vienna, 24th August 2015

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Bc. Jan Hrubý

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# Introduction

With every interaction, whether active or passive, we find ourselves communicating with other people. Even our silence connotes some intention, which others may interpret at their discretion. Whether by artefact or by attendance, every human being constantly participates in the process of communication.

Necessity to express our ideas in a way they are understood has been present with the mankind since the very beginning. Since the dawn of our civilisation our ancestors used different forms of communication to mark their territory, commemorate important events, or transport messages.

Upon development of the society and specialisation to perform specific tasks our communication needed to evolve as well. Suddenly it was required to communicate what can an individual offer to the others Egyptians used papyrus to make sales messages and wall posters. Commercial messages and political campaign displays have been found in the ruins of Pompeii and ancient Arabia. Lost and found advertising on papyrus was common in Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome.

Reaching out to customers became necessary for survival of a business. Convincing a prospective customer that the offered product is superior became the very basis for successful sales. Now more than ever, in the age of the information overflow, when humans are bombarded by messages from all possible sources, it is absolutely crucial that the customer is reached with the best possible value proposition—served using the communication channels that are natural and comfortable for the customer. Understanding the customer's needs and behaviour is critical to be able to deliver a tailored message that is engaging and well-received.

This thesis focuses on refining the communication strategy from the point of view of a customer for the biggest student organisation in Europe—Erasmus Student Network AISBL.

# **1 Objectives and methodology**

## **1.1 Problem definition**

Being the biggest student organisation in Europe, Erasmus Student Network consists of 18,000 volunteers serving 100,000 exchange students every year. Due to its organisational complexity, bottom-up structure, and wide variety of stakeholders the communication strategy implemented in the organisation needs to accommodate a large number of requirements.

The biggest issue being that the content strategy hasn't been built systematically, rather snow-balled as the organisation grew and new needs and opportunities have arisen.

## **1.2 Objectives**

The main objective of the thesis is to clarify the communication strategy of the organisation focusing on content strategy, accommodating the needs of the stakeholders by using the personas approach. Since the organisation operates as a non-profit, it is required to plan the execution of the proposal while keeping the expenditures as low as possible.

In order to fulfil this, several secondary objectives are defined: literature review, analysis of the status quo, and the proposal itself. These pillars allow for deeper understanding of the issue and support fulfilment of the main objective.

The main points of the literature review, which will be explained in the following chapters, are:

- Marketing mix
  - Integrated Marketing Communications
  - Environment analysis
  - Personas

The second part, focused on the analysis of the current status, consists of:

- Company description
- Outer environment
- Inner environment
- Stakeholders

### **1.3 Methodology**

The methodology used follows the objectives defined in the previous chapter. First part of the thesis—the literature review—introduces the terminology and the key learnings about the issue as discussed by established industry researchers. The second chapter directly follows by using introduced methods to analyse the current situation in the organisation from different perspectives. Based on this analysis the third chapter of the thesis concludes the findings with proposing content strategy which is custom-tailored to the needs of the identified stakeholders using the personas approach.



## 2 Theoretical background

### 2.1 Corporate communications

Every organisations communicates with its stakeholders whether it being actively or passively. In order to achieve company goals, corporate communications are understood as a wide range of activities involved in managing and orchestrating all internal and external communications which aim at creating a desired point of view among stakeholders (Riel & Fombrun, 2007).

The word desired is key in this context. Any activity an organisation performs in its communication strategy needs to be clearly linked with developing the *desired* outcome in the eyes of the stakeholders. In case the link is missing, the outcome of the activities is very difficult to monitor and the outcome is unpredictable. The approach and the underlying philosophy behind reaching out to customers and building an engaging message has significantly changed throughout the years.

#### 2.1.1 Traditional communication strategy

According to the American Marketing Association (2013):

*“Marketing is an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders.”*

This definition suits an anachronistic vision of marketing, in which messages are created, communicated and delivered to customers via one-way channels—namely advertising. Speaking of outdated: In the early 1960s, Jerome McCarthy defined four elements that collectively comprised the “marketing mix:” product, price, place and promotion. These “4 P’s,” as they are often called, shaped the process of creating marketing messages for years (McCarthy & Perreault, 1960):

- Product: Select the tangible and intangible benefits of the product.
- Price: Determine an appropriate product pricing structure.
- Promotion: Create awareness of the product among the target audience.
- Place: Make the product available to the customer.

Classic marketing strategies like primetime television advertisements, buy one get one free coupons, and direct mail catalogues are all examples of push marketing (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). The prominent approach for this type of

strategy is a spreading vast amount of non-targeted messages hoping that some of them reach our desired target audience.

Any relationship with the customer is missing and focus is put almost solely on pushing the products towards the masses. Messages like statements about quality, value, quality are emphasised in order to actively convince the customer about superiority of the product. Price often becomes one of the key parts of the message and discounts are extremely prominent (Kotler, 2010).

Many of the typical marketing channels fit into this category: television, radio, newspaper, direct mail, catalogues, email, and direct sales. The commonality across all of these channels is that the buyer being targeted may not be aware of the product or service until the information about it is pushed at them through the marketing channel. The customer is typically defined only demographically or geographically and no deeper analysis of the customer needs is performed.

The model of push marketing can be simplified into activities happening between three basic elements of the market:



Figure 1: Push Marketing Model, adapted from Kotler, 2010

### **2.1.2 Modern approach to company communications**

As digital channels emerged and broke down every proverbial wall that separated the company from its stakeholders, and stakeholder groups from each other, protecting corporate reputation and building a strong brand identity became paramount. Such narrow approach as described in the previous paragraph simply couldn't remain to be effective. Suddenly it was stakeholders being in control rather than corporate executives. Marketing communications inevitably had to move from monologue to dialogue.

A modern communication strategy focuses on creating quality content that pulls people towards the organisation and product, where they naturally want to be. This approach is called pull marketing or inbound marketing. Many of the newer marketing channels fit into this category: company and marketing websites, search engine optimization (SEO), blogging, social media campaigns, customer interaction and relationship management (Kotler, 2010).

The commonality across these channels is that the customer being targeted is aware of at least the type of product or service that they are interested in, though they may not be aware of your specific product or brand. The content is carefully selected to reach the customer's needs even though it doesn't immediately lead to conversion. The marketing activities are timed to reach the customer in the right place at the right time, in order for the message to be relevant and helpful to the customers, not interruptive. The model is described in the figure 2:



Figure 2: Pull Marketing Model, adapted from Kotler, 2010

Several reoccurring themes are typical for a well-established inbound marketing strategy (Halligan & Shah, 2009):

- **Content creation and distribution:** Content is created in order to answer customers' needs, this content is then shared by the customers themselves among their acquaintances
- **Lifecycle marketing:** the whole journey of a potential customer is targeted with specific content, these actions help to convert strangers into visitors, contacts, customers and potentially organic brand promoters

- **Personalization:** Content is tailored to the wants and needs of the customers who are reached with it. This becomes a cyclical process where learning leads to better personalisation of the messages
- **Multi-channel:** Customers are reached in environments where they feel natural, it is hence necessary to consider a multi-platform approach and reach out in channels where the customers want to interact with the organisation.
- **Integration:** The whole process of creating content, publishing it on various channels, and measuring the success needs to work together in integration. This allows the organisation to further strengthen targeting and personalisation.

The concept of personalisation is omnipresent in the modern approach. Its core idea can be expressed in an old hunters' saying:

*“Having a bigger target doesn’t improve your aim.”*

## 2.2 Integrated Marketing Communications

It is not however to say that one approach is significantly better than the other. The true key to exploiting the full potential is not focusing on a narrow set of elements (in this context only pull marketing) hoping the best results (Kitchen & Pelsmacker, 2004). As mentioned by study performed by NPD Group (2013), 81% of Millennials (which we can safely consider to be a very digitally-savvy generation) still spend their hard-earned money in a brick-and-mortar store when it comes to their retail consumption. This clearly shows that while a person might fall into a certain demographic they still seek and respond to more traditional forms of marketing.

The true key is in integrating all the actions (regardless if “traditional or modern”) that lead to building positive relationships with the stakeholders in a well-oiled machine of Integrated Marketing Communications (Kitchen & Pelsmacker, 2004).

Schultz, et al., (1993) identifies four elements that combine to create true integrated marketing communications:

- **Customer-Centric:** Deep understanding of the customer lies at the very core of every successful communication strategy. It is necessary to go beyond demographics to really define customer segments, their behaviour and motivation that drives their decisions

- **Data-Driven:** With every action customers are providing information about their behaviour and preferences. This data can be easily collected for instance from social media platforms and company databases and refined in order to identify and understand who are the best potential customers, what they want and like, and to make qualified decisions about how to communicate with them.
- **Integration:** Customers and other stakeholders—including government officials, the media, employees and others—do not distinguish between messages intended for them and those intended for other audiences. It is needed to precisely align all advertising, direct and online marketing, public relations, and also business processes, organisational culture as well as customer service to achieve consistent messaging on all possible channels
- **Effective Branding:** Customers who feel truly respected and understood demonstrate behaviour which is the “holy grail” of every marketer—loyalty to products, services, and company brand. These customers reward the organisation with high retention rate which in turn translates into improved profitability.

### 2.2.1 Integrated Marketing Activities

Any activity performed in an integrated marketing strategy falls into one of the four stages of the customer lifecycle. These stages have clear and distinct goals and work together in a cycle, each stage's goal is to move the prospective customer to the next one. In case of the last stage its goal is to on-board others (Halligan & Shah, 2009). The whole cycle is illustrated below:



Figure 3: Integrated Marketing Activities, adapted from Halligan & Shah, 2009

### 2.2.1.1 Attraction

Attracting potential customers is the first step, it is important to say the personalisation aspect is needed from the very beginning the organisation doesn't want to spend its resources on attracting just anyone, it is important to attract people who are most likely to become leads and, ultimately, satisfied customers (Halligan & Shah, 2009).

Identification of the right people is a process called personas definition. Personas are holistic ideals of what the customers are like, inside and out. Personas encompass the needs, challenges, pain points, common usage of products and services, as well as personal and demographic information shared among all members of that particular customer type. All in all, personas are the people the communication strategy is built around (Pruitt & Grudin, 2003).

Some of the most important tools to attract the right customers are:

- **Personal meetings:** The best possible way to start the process of converting customers is face-to-face contact. It is important for the company's employees to be trained well to be able to provide answers to any possible questions. The opportunity for a conversation at the very beginning of the process allows clarifying many facts that would normally be up to customer's consideration (Duffy, 2005). The targeting aspect is tackled by selecting identified meeting points of the customers (e.g. stands at conferences and fairs, organising informal activities, etc.)
- **Blogging:** A blog is a brilliant way to attract new customers, allowing for expression of opinions, and when performed correctly, also for highly engaging story-telling. The topics may range from helpful advice to company stories, however any content produced needs to fit in the needs of the target group.
- **SEO:** When the targeted customers begin their journey online, it is most usually by using a search engine searching for something are seeking answers for. It is therefore critical to appear prominently on the places they search. In order to do that, the organisation needs to carefully pick the proper keywords, optimise their pages for these keywords, create content, and build links around the terms customers are searching for (Search Engine Journal, 2015).
- **Pages:** In these days a website is an organisation's digital storefront. The website needs to have a clear information architecture that guides

to users to the answers they are searching and must as well look appealing. Clear CTAs<sup>1</sup> need to be present to urge the user to perform activities which help move him or her forward through the customer lifecycle.

- **Social Publishing:** With social media platforms on the rise in various forms an organisation needs to follow the trends. The social content allows a company to share information in the channels their customers spend time on, engage into conversation with them, motivate them into actions and put a human face on the brand (Edwards, 2011).

### 2.2.1.2 Conversion

As soon as the potential customers became attracted—i.e. expressed interest in the communication channels—the next step is to convert the customers into leads by gathering their contact information. The basic type remains to be an email address even though with some upcoming social media platforms users might prefer being contact solely using their profile in the service (Halligan & Shah, 2009).

The contact information is the most valuable thing there is in the digital age so the customers have to be given something in return. The “payment” is simple—exclusive content (Kitchen & Pelsmacker, 2004).

Some of the most important tools in converting visitors to leads include:

- **Forms:** If a person wants to access the exclusive content he or she needs to fill out a form and submit their information to the company. The content is then shared with the user on using the information they submitted to ensure the information is valid and can be used to company purposes as well. Optimisation of the form from the perspective of user experience is required to make sure the dropouts (customers who leave before they finish this step) is as low as possible (Wild, 2009).
- **Calls-to-Action:** Calls-to-action are buttons or links that encourage your visitors to take action, like “Sign up for a Newsletter” or “Buy now!” Clicking on a CTA usually becomes the first part of a buying

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<sup>1</sup> Call-to-action

process. The CTAs need to be engaging to the target group yet they need to be used in a moderate amount (Yerian, 2011).

- **Landing Pages:** When a website visitor clicks on a call-to-action, they should then be sent to a landing page. A landing page is where the offer in the call-to-action is fulfilled, and where the prospect submits information that your sales team can use to begin a conversation with them. When website visitors fill out a form on a landing page for the first time, that visitor becomes a contact.
- **Contacts:** Keep track of the leads you're converting in a centralised marketing database. Having all your data in one place helps you make sense out of every interaction you've had with your contacts - be it through email, a landing page, social media, or otherwise - and how to optimise your future interactions to more effectively attract, convert, close, and delight your buyer personas.

### 2.2.1.3 Closing

The right target groups have been attracted and the company has successfully converted them into leads. The next logical step is making a sale—closing the customer. Potential customers at this stage need a lot of nurturing and personal-like approach from the organisation to assure favourable closing rate (Halligan & Shah, 2009).

Crucial tools for this stage of the customer cycle are the following:

- **Customer Relationship Management:** Details about all of the contacts, companies, deals, and leads in the pipeline are stored in a CRM system. Such system allows the organisation to keep track of every single process, what has been communicated, and gives the opportunity to push at the right time to finalise the transaction (Chen & Popovich, 2003).
- **Closed-loop Reporting:** At this stage a company's sales team comes into play, focusing solely on closing the customers. From a marketing perspective it is important to know which marketing actions are bringing the most easily convertible leads and to adjust the efforts based on this information (Duffy, 2005).
- **Email user journey:** A customer clicking on a call-to-action or filling a form should trigger a set of emails when he or she doesn't finish the transaction. These are focused on building trust with the



prospect and prepare them to be ready to buy (Halligan & Shah, 2009). Based on the information the company gathers from the customer behaviour it's possible to trigger a full remarketing campaign—very closely targeted advertising created using deep knowledge about the customer's actions (e.g. PPC adverts of the product the customer had in his shopping cart)

- **Marketing Automation:** Similar to the previous point this activity involves creating specific email marketing customer tailored to the needs and the lifecycle of each standalone lead. Gathering information from various entry points of the organisation this is handled completely by an automated system and doesn't require a human sending the messages. For example if a person expressed interest in the company's activities and is a follower on Twitter, the system automatically send the lead a message with the newest articles on the same topic.

#### 2.2.1.4 Delighting

The modern marketing is about providing outstanding content to all users, whether they are strangers, leads, or already paying customers. Just because someone has already written off a check doesn't mean the organisation should stop caring.

Continuing to engage and delight those who already made a purchase has shown to be extremely effective in understanding the customer behaviour, as happy customers are most like to share deeper insights with the company (Halligan & Shah, 2009). Eventually these should become happy brand promoters of the organisation and the products they love.

Tools used to delight customers include:

- **Surveys:** The best way to figure what the customers need and want is obviously by asking them. The feedback surveys provide a very valuable source of data, yet they need to be very carefully executed to make sure the efforts put into creation of such survey. Processing of such survey leads to deeper understanding if the company is providing the customers truly with what they need (Wright, 2005).
- **Community building:** Customers of a company have one thing in common—being customers of said company. By providing them with a platform where they can communicate with each other the

organisation creates an additional source of information and feedback. It is highly suggested these channels are provided by the company to allow for effective monitoring of the channels.

- **Smart Text:** After-purchase the organisation should have a very good overview of what the customer responds to and what are his or her interests. By building upon helping them to achieve their goals the company should provide extra content about the purchased products and use these channels to introduce new products and features that might be of interest for them.
- **Social Monitoring:** People these days love to express their opinions. A company which cares about the social buzz gets to know their customers' questions, comments, like, and dislikes. This allows for generation of more relevant content.

## 2.3 Customer analysis

Laughlin (2015) defines the customer analysis as following:

*“A non-obvious understanding about your customers, which if acted upon, has the potential to change their behaviour for mutual benefit.”*

A customer analysis (sometimes called a customer profile or target market analysis) is the first building block of a company's communication strategy. It identifies target customers, ascertains the needs, specifics, and behavioural patterns of these customers (Laughlin, 2015).

A customer analysis is a complex process that can help organisations better understand current and potential customers, in order to increase sales and grow their business. Basic customer profiles are a collection of information about customers that help determine why people buy or don't buy a product. Customer profiles can also help develop targeted marketing plans and help ensure that products meet the needs of their intended audience (Wübben & Wangenheim, 2008).

There are two primary aspects to any customer analysis, a demographic profile and a behavioural analysis. Demographic profiles break down customers into age, income, geographic and other easily identifiable categories. A behavioural analysis in its simplest form identifies the reasons customers choose to buy a product instead of the alternatives.

### 2.3.1 Personas

The origin of the concept of personas can be tracked down to one chapter in a book by Alan Cooper (1999):

*“It is vitally important that everyone on the design team not only become familiar with the cast of characters, but that each persona become[s] like a real person.”*

Even though originally created for computer code development teams, other fields such as designers and marketers have quickly discovered the strength of having such approach, even though it might be contra-intuitive (Cooper, 1999).

A persona is an archetype of a user. When constructed properly it can help guiding decisions about product features, navigation, interactions, visual design, or in our case, content. By creating for the archetype—whose needs, motivation, and behaviour need to be well understood—an organisation can satisfy broader group of people represented by the archetype.

In most cases, personas are created from series of interview with real people and observing their behaviour, then summarised in short (no longer than a page) description including behaviour patterns, needs, pain points, attitude and environment on top of fictional story to bring the persona to life (Ames, 2001).

Cooper categorizes personas into three types. Each has its own advantages and shortcomings.

- **Marketing personas:** These are primarily focused on demographic information, buying motivations and needs, shopping preferences, responsiveness to certain value propositions, media habits and such. Typically described as a range (e.g., 30 – 45 years old, live in USA or Canada), and explain customer behaviour but do not get deep into the reasoning behind it. Marketing personas are good for determining what types of customers will be receptive to certain products or messages, or for evaluating potential ROI of a product (Goodwin, 2008). What they are not good for is for defining a product or service—what it is, how it will work, and how it will be used; or for prioritizing features in a product or service (Cooper, et al., 2007).
- **Design personas:** focus on user goals, current behaviour, and pain points as opposed to their buying or media preferences and behaviours. They are based on field research and real people. They tell a story and describe why people do what they do in attempt to help everyone involved in designing and building a product or service

understand, relate to, and remember the end user throughout the entire product development process (Cooper, et al., 2007). Design personas are good for communicating research insights and user goals, understanding and focusing on certain types of users, defining a product or service, and avoiding the elastic user and self-referential design.

- **Proto-personas:** are used when there is no money or time to create true research-based personas – they are based on secondary research and the team’s educated guess of who they should be designing for. According to Cooper, using a proto-persona to drive design decisions is still better than having no persona at although of course they should be validated with research (Cooper, 1999).

This cannot be seen as solely black-and-white for the instance of creating a communication strategy. A marketer needs to create personas that fit his needs and they will most likely have overlapping characteristics of both marketing and design personas.

### 2.3.1.1 Personas principles

It can be tempting to assemble a set of user characteristics and call it a persona, but it's not so easy to create personas that are truly effective design and communication tools. Cooper (2007) and Goodwin (2008) identify following principles for creation of useful and effective personas:

- **Personas describe patterns, not job descriptions:** A persona is not only a list of tasks the target group needs or wants to achieve; it’s a narrative outlining someone’s daily routine, their skills, environment, their attitude and goals. There is rarely a visible connection between personas and job descriptions. A single persona can represent wide variety of jobs and vice versa. For example the same stakeholder can be represented in different personas in different stages of their customer cycle. These personas will have radically different needs and types of content they respond to.
- **A personas set can’t be huge:** Personas need to be crisp, they can’t blur into each other. Ideally the marketer should only create the minimum number of personas to illustrate the key goals and patterns that have been decided to be upon consideration. There is no magic number, the key aspect is being able to make clear distinctions between the individual persona descriptions.

- **Add life to the personas, but don't overdo it:** A part of the persona creation is giving the fictional set of data a biography and a story. The personal details can be fun to focus on but if there are too many of them they get in the way of the real purpose of the persona—describe the patterns of a certain group of people. It's advisable to focus first on the behaviour, goals, environment and attitude of a persona—the critical information for making decisions—and adding the personality at the very end. When used reasonably, the little details can turn a generic user into a precise marketing target.
- **Each persona should have three or four important goals:** A goal in this context is an outcome of usually several tasks. It is important that certain types of goals are more valuable for persona creation in communication strategy. Life goals are usually too broad—“Retire by age of 45”—may sound vague but can be easily broken down into several smaller goals that lead to accomplishment of this goal. Experience goals are very prominent in services and product design—an example of such experience goal can be “Feeling confident that bank transaction are secure”. Most of the goals given should although be end goals—these focus on the benefit a person could get out of using the service or product.

### 2.3.1.2 Elements of a persona

Each persona description is different as they are tailored for the needs of the organisation's communication strategy. Yet, personas generally include the following key pieces of information:

- Persona Group (i.e. web manager)
- Fictional name
- Job titles and major responsibilities
- Demographics such as age, education, ethnicity, and family status
- The benefits they might gain from using the service/product
- Their physical, social, and technological environment
- A quote that sums up what matters most to the persona as it relates to the organisation
- Casual picture representing that user group

### 2.3.1.3 Personas creation

- 1) **Identify the stakeholders:** The first step is knowing who the important stakeholders for the organisation are. This can usually be picked up from the organisation's general strategy document. The stakeholder's identification should provide basic starting points describing demographics and needs of these groups. Traditional research is a good starting, sourcing the first cornerstones of the future personas document.

Questions to be asked at this stage range in these:

- a. Who are the customers and why should they be interested in the organisation?
- b. What behaviour, assumption, and expectations have influence on their view of the organisation?

- 2) **Identify their goals, needs, values, and fears:** The most effective (and most resources and time-consuming) method to learn from the possible customers is to perform qualitative research—interview and/or observe their behaviour. It is important to have an overview of the questions in advance, as consistency is needed among all interviewees. Creating such a script also forces the marketer to think about what needs to be learnt from the research participants. The interview should be built in a way that it provides thorough understanding of the participants, their opinions, attitudes, and perspectives. The questions and areas of observation don't need to be exhaustive at this stage, mostly because at this point the goal is to gather fundamental understanding from which the marketer can then extrapolate new and more specific questions for the next iteration. However, by capturing the essence of their perspective since the beginning, a marketer will be able to create a persona that brings their voice into conversation.

Questions common for this stage are:

- a. What's important to them and what's driving them?
- b. What could they gain for themselves from the organisation?
- c. What do they believe in?
- d. Who do they turn to for advice or information?
- e. What's the value they visualise once they make a decision?

- 3) **Condense the research—segmentation:** After performing the first interviews there should already be patterns visible, grouping several description for each stakeholder group into logical groups. There is no secret recipe for this and the process is dependent on the experience and the personal touch of the marketer. Roles are great for segmenting and grouping

similar users together for analysis, but roles are not personas. Roles are defined largely by the tasks people perform, rather than by how they perform those tasks or how they feel about accomplishing the tasks. Usually, two or more personas are required to represent the range of behaviour within a stakeholder group.

Often the patterns will not apply to every single one of the spectra, yet as long as the participants match on the majority of it, the pattern is valid.

- 4) **Synthesize a model of users:** When there are groups segmented that are distinct enough, finally the personas can be produced. The common, average, or on the other hand dominant traits of each of the groups need to be captured in each persona. Some of the personas will be more important for the company's communication strategy than others so it's useful to rank them in primary, secondary, and possibly complementary categories and to give these different levels of detail. Personas that are the most important for the organisation should be given more attention than a persona the organisation is not trying to target at the moment.
- 5) **Produce a persona description sheet:** In order for consistency the whole organisation needs to be aware of the personas. To effectively communicate outcomes of the persona development, a one-pager defining all the important traits of the persona. An example of a possible design is given below:



Figure 4: Example of a personas description document, Bolt | Peters (2015)

- 6) **Refine:** In the best case scenario, the personas are based on carefully executed research. Yet, they are almost exclusively made based on a very small sample of the possible population and assumptions are made. Therefore, the final step in persona creation is continuous development.



Using data from organisation's entry points, tracking the personas through their customer lifecycle, and comparing real-life information with the assumptions these are given validation and possibly adjustments to better reflect reality. The personas can also change throughout the lifetime of the organisation and they should never be reused when there are major changes happening in the company.

The continuous development of the personas is summed up in the following diagram:

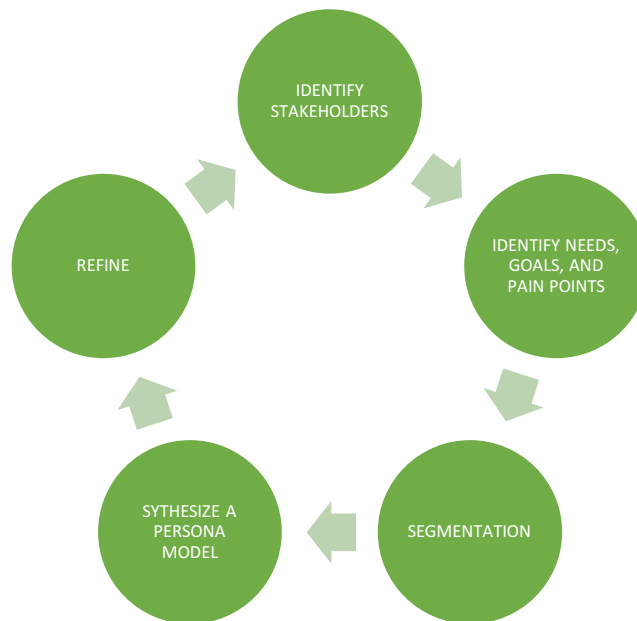


Figure 5: Personas creation process, adapted from Goodwin (2008)



## **2.4 Environment analysis**

In order to choose the fitting approach it is of course needed to know the position the company is on the market at the moment. For this several tools of environment analysis will be used.

### **2.4.1 PEST analysis**

PEST analysis is an analysis of external macro-environment in which an organisation exists. It examines the political, economic, sociocultural and technological factors that could influence an organisation. PEST factors can be used as opportunities and threats in SWOT analysis. That is why PEST analysis is often done before SWOT analysis (Partridge, 1999).

#### **2.4.1.1 Political factors**

Political factors have a direct and significant impact on the way how organisation/provider of advertising media operates. Government regulations affect public and private sector and different decisions of government could have impact also on the spending power of consumers. Political factors include (Partridge, 1999):

- government regulations (for example prohibition of billboards on highways)
- environmental regulations (Labelling Directive EU)
- tax policy
- trade restrictions
- political stability

The following questions should be considered:

- How stable is the political environment?
- How big is the impact of environmental regulations?

#### **2.4.1.2 Economic factors:**

Economic factors have an impact on all organisations/providers of advertising media. The behaviour of consumers and their purchasing power is also affected by the state of economy- boom, recession, recovery (Partridge, 1999). Economic factors include:

- economic growth
- interest rates
- inflation

- currency exchange rates
- budget allocation
- employment
- long term prospect of the economy

#### **2.4.1.3 Socio-cultural factors**

Socio-cultural factors have an impact on what customers want and need and affect the size of potential market. These factors cover demographic changes, trends in the way people live, work and think and cultural aspects of the macro environment (Partridge, 1999). Socio-cultural factors include:

- Population growth rate
- Age distribution
- Dominant religion
- Attitudes to new products and services
- Career attitudes
- How much time do consumers have for leisure
- Opinion on green issues
- Internal/external emphasis on safety
- Internal/external attitudes to change
- What are the roles of men and women within society
- How are views expressed

#### **2.4.1.4 Technological factors**

New technologies influence the way organisation/provider of advertising media operates. They can influence barriers to entry, production levels, outsourcing decisions etc. New technologies may be a source of competitive advantage and lead to efficiency. Technological development influences the speed of information flow and also the speed organisations/providers of advertising media need to adapt to changing environment. Those, who are slow, will fail (Partridge, 1999).

Technological factors include:

- automation
- investment incentives
- rate of technological change

The following questions should be considered:

- Does technology allow the products and services to be made more cheaply and to a better standard of quality?

- Do the technologies offer consumers and businesses more innovative products and services?
- How is communication changed by new technologies?
- How is advertising changed by new technologies?

### 2.4.2 Porter's five forces model

Porter's Five Forces model dates back to 1979 and identifies external forces that companies are affected by when competing within a market (Porter, 1985). The theory presents five forces which influence the competitive intensity and the attractiveness of the chosen market. It is used to determine where power lies. Porter's five forces show current strength of the organisation and also the strengths of a future moves. The five competitive forces are the power of suppliers, the power of buyers, competitive rivalry, the threat of substitution, and the threat of new entry and will be explained hereinafter in the Porter's five forces diagram.

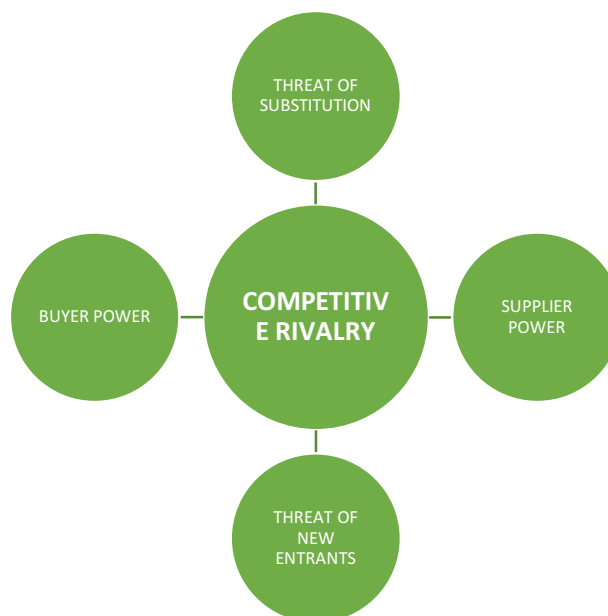


Figure 6: Porter's Five Forces Model, adapted from Porter (1985)

#### 2.4.2.1 Power of suppliers

The aim is to answer a question: „How much power do the suppliers have over the organisation?“ Every company needs some inputs: Labour, material, machinery, services etc. and the cost of these inputs can significantly influence the profitability of the organisation's communication efforts. Whether the power of suppliers represents a weak or a strong force depends on their bargaining power and to what extent they can affect the terms and conditions of the

transaction. Under normal conditions, suppliers tend to offer the highest possible price and no additional services, but if their power is weak, the organisation can be able to negotiate better terms.

On the contrary, if the power of suppliers is high, the organisation will have to pay higher prices and accept lower quality or services (Porter, 2008).

The following factors increase the power of suppliers (Porter, 2008):

- Only a few suppliers offer the required input.
- There is no substitute for what the supplier provides.
- Switching suppliers is costly.
- Purchases of the organisation don't make a substantial part of supplier's sales.
- Suppliers can sell directly to customers of the organisation.

Reducing the bargaining power of suppliers (Porter, 2008):

- If the organisation was able to produce some of the inputs on its own, it would reduce the bargaining power of suppliers.
- Make a partnership with suppliers, which could be beneficial for both.
- The organisation can also form a group of small producers to act like a one big customer.
- If the organisation is wealthy enough, it can also buy the supplier.

#### **2.4.2.2 The power of buyers**

The aim is to answer a question: How much negotiation power do the buyers have? The power of buyers examines how big impact customers have on the profit of the organisation. Buyers want the lowest price for the best quality and additional services. The more power have the buyers, the lower profit will be left for the organisation.

Buyers have more power when they are big and they purchase majority of the output, if the organisation has just few big buyers, they have a big power to negotiate price, terms and conditions that are beneficial for them (Porter, 2008).

The following factors increase the power of buyers (Porter, 2008):

- There are many small suppliers but a few big buyers in the industry
- The product or service represents a large expense for the buyers
- The buyers are well informed about the market demand, prices, costs etc.
- The product or service is homogenous and can be purchased from other suppliers
- Buyers can produce the product or service on their own

- Buyers can easily, and with little cost, switch to another product.
- Buyers earn low profits or are otherwise under pressure to reduce the purchasing costs.

Reducing the bargaining power of buyers:

The power of buyers can be reduced by increasing the loyalty of the buyers, for example by loyalty programs or by increasing the inherent or perceived value of a product by adding features or branding. The other way is to select customers that have small or no knowledge about the market.

### **2.4.2.3 Threat of new entrants**

The aim is to answer a question: How easy is it for organisations to enter the market? The threat of new entrants examines the possibility, that there will be new entrants to the market. New entrants are attracted by the success of other firms in the industry.

The extent of the threat is given by the barriers to entry the market (costs to entry or legal requirements) and by reactions of the existing organisations to a new entrant. New entrants could force the prices down (Porter, 2008).

The following factors increase the threat of new entrants (Porter, 2008):

- Licenses or patents are not required to do the business.
- Customers have little brand loyalty, so competitors for example don't have to invest significantly in advertising etc.
- The start-up costs are low.
- The products or services are not unique.
- Costs to switch suppliers are low (it is easier for new entrants to gain customers).
- The process of production is simple and understandable.
- The inputs (employees, material etc.) are easy to access.
- The economies of scale are minimal.
- The existing firms don't have resources to fight back
- The industry growth is quick.

Reducing the threat of new entry:

The threat of new entrants may be reduced by enhancing brand image, using patents and licences or creating alliances with associated products. It is important to show that existing organisations are willing to fight the new entrants and to set the prices in the way that will discourage them from entering the market.

#### **2.4.2.4 Threat of substitutes**

The aim is to answer a question: What products could customers buy instead of yours? Majority of the products or services can be replaced by products or services of competitors. If the product or service is undifferentiated, it is easy for customers to switch one product or service to another. By substitute is meant a product/service that can fulfil similar needs to the product or service of the examined organisation.

Substitutes do not have to come from usual competitors. The threat is bigger if the alternative products (substitutes) have lower prices, better performance or both. It's far more difficult for an organisation to try to raise prices and make bigger profits when there are close substitutes and low switching costs (Porter, 2008).

The following factors increase the threat of substitutes (Porter, 2008):

- The product doesn't have any additional benefit compared to the products or services of competitors.
- It is easy for customers to switch products.
- Customers are not loyal.

Reducing the threat of substitutes:

The threat of substitutes can be reduced by differentiating products by branding and closely watch the preferences of the customers. If the advertising is too expensive, there is an option of collective advertising for an industry.

#### **2.4.2.5 Rivalry among competitors**

The aim is to answer a question: How intense is your competition? Companies in an industry are mutually dependent, actions by one company usually invite competitive retaliation. An analysis of rivalry looks at the extent to which the value created in an industry will be dissipated through head-to-head competition. The rivalry among competitors is often seen as the strongest among all the five forces. However it can widely differ from industry to industry. If this force is weak, organisations can afford to give higher prices for less quality and make more profit.

Sometimes, when the rivalry is too high, companies are forced to set the prices below the break-even levels. In some industries, the competitive rivalry lies in setting the lowest possible price, in other industries it is more about offering customers the most attractive combination of performance features, introducing new products, offering more after-sale services or warranties, or creating a stronger brand image than competitors (Porter, 2008).

The following factors increase the rivalry among competitors:

- There are more leading firms striving for the position of the market leader.
- The rivalry is more likely when the market is growing slowly or shrinking and the potential to sell products is stagnant or declining.
- Fixed costs of the production are high.
- Products are perishable and need to be sold quickly.
- Products are undifferentiated.
- Customers can easily switch between products.
- There are high exit costs.

Reducing the rivalry among competitors:

- To minimise price war, it will help to distinguish the product/service from those of competition by innovation and improving features.
- Focusing on a unique segment of the market
- Distributing products in a novel channel
- Trying to form stronger relationships and build customer loyalty.

### **2.4.3 SWOT analysis**

Some authors credit SWOT to Albert Humphrey, who led a convention at the Stanford Research Institute in the 1960s and 1970s using data from Fortune 500 companies (TAM Plc., 2015). However, Humphrey himself does not claim the creation of SWOT, and the origins remain obscure (Humphrey, 2005). Letters SWOT stand for: S- Strengths, W-Weaknesses, O-Opportunities, and T-Threats.

To identify strengths, the following questions might be considered:

- What does your organisation do better than others?
- What are your unique selling points?
- What do competitors and customers in your market perceive as your strengths?
- What is your competitive edge? etc.

To identify weaknesses, the following questions might be considered:

- What do other organisations do better?
- What elements of your business add little or no value?
- What do competitors and customers in your market perceive as your weakness? etc.

To identify opportunities, the following questions might be considered:

- What political, economic, socio-cultural or technological (PEST) changes are taking place that could be favourable for you?
- Are there currently gaps in the market or unfulfilled demand?
- What innovation could you bring to the market? etc.

To identify threats, the following questions might be considered:

- What political, economic, socio-cultural or technological (PEST) changes are taking place that could be unfavourable for you?
- What restraint do you face?
- What is your competition doing that could negatively impact you? etc.

To illustrate the analysis, often a simple 2X2 SWOT matrix is used. On the next page, an example of such a SWOT matrix is given:

# SWOT ANALYSIS

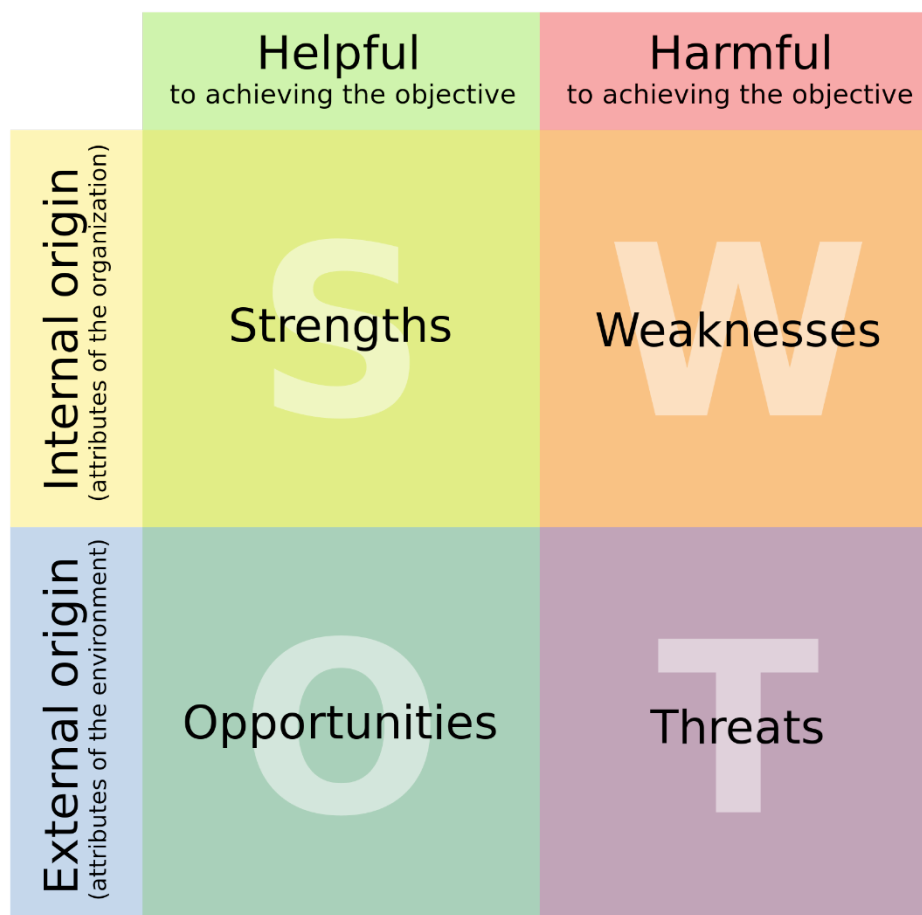


Figure 7: SWOT matrix, Anon. (2015)



## **3 Status quo analysis**

### **3.1 Organisation description**

#### **3.1.1 History and goals**

In 1987 a plan to create an extensive mobility scheme for higher education was approved by the European Community (EC). One part of this was the Erasmus programme - for students in order to provide the opportunity to spend part of their studies abroad.

In 1989 the Erasmus Bureau invited 32 former Erasmus Students for an evaluation meeting in Gent, Belgium. This meeting was a starting point for Erasmus Student Network, abbreviated as ESN. The problems that became obvious in the evaluation were the main tasks for the founders of ESN to work on. Behind all this stood the idea of “students helping students”, which is still the most important motto of ESN volunteers.

The Erasmus Student Network is currently the biggest student association in Europe. It was born on the 16th of October 1989 and legally registered in 1990 for supporting and developing student exchange. It is currently present in more than 489 Higher Education Institutions from 37 countries. The network is constantly developing and expanding. There are around 14,500 active members that are in many sections supported by so called “buddies”, whose main task is to act as mentors for international students (Klimacki, et al., 2015).

Thus, ESN involves around 29,000 young people offering its services to around 180,000 international students every year. ESN works for the creation of a more mobile and flexible education environment by supporting and developing student exchange as well as providing an intercultural experience also to those students who cannot access a period abroad (“internationalisation at home”).

The organisation’s vision as mentioned in (Klimacki, et al., 2015) is:

*“Enrichment of society through international students.”*

#### **3.1.2 Current status**

ESN works on three different levels: local, national, and international. In the local level, sections, clubs or registered organizations offer hands-on support for incoming international students, as well as outgoing and returning students. Mainly, ESN sections organise events, activities and trips, for example, trips to other countries and cities, language and movie evenings or sport and social

activities. The main principle is “students helping students”, therefore, the organization is easily approachable. The local level is the core of ESN.

The national level is operated by the National Board (NB), usually a registered legal entity. National Boards are executive bodies which work for the interests of their sections. They can, for example, negotiate national contracts with companies to receive discounts or sponsorships, organise national and international events, and supervise the interest of their sections on national and international level (Erasmus Student Network, 2015).

In the national environment, National Boards meet with the country officials, such as National Agencies, governmental offices or higher education officers. The highest decision organ of national level is called the National Platform (NP) which is composed of all ESN sections within the country. The National Platform of a country can accept new member organisations and elects the National Board.

In the international level, the National Representative (a member of the National Board) of a country represents its position in the CNR—Council of National Representatives. The CNR is the main strategic body of ESN, represents the opinions of the countries, makes proposals for projects, and updates the network about current issues. Every year the CNR meets altogether with representatives of each section in ESN in the Annual General Meeting—AGM. This is the highest decision-making body of the organisation and decides on budget, strategy, action plans, and elects members of the International Board (Erasmus Student Network, 2015).

The International Board is the main executive body of ESN International. Five members work full time in the organisation’s headquarters in Brussels for a year-long mandate. The IB is responsible for representing the interests of the whole network to the stakeholders, for example, the European Commission and the Council of Europe. The IB is responsible for executing international projects, such as study surveys or higher education policies. The major ESN projects today are ESNcard, which is planned to provide quality services, gather discounts and exclusive events for all international students in order to “unite members of the Erasmus generation”, SocialErasmus, which motivates exchange students to become active the local community volunteering, and Mov’in Europe, which promotes mobility as a lifestyle (Klimacki, et al., 2015).

Full organisational structure of ESN is provided below:

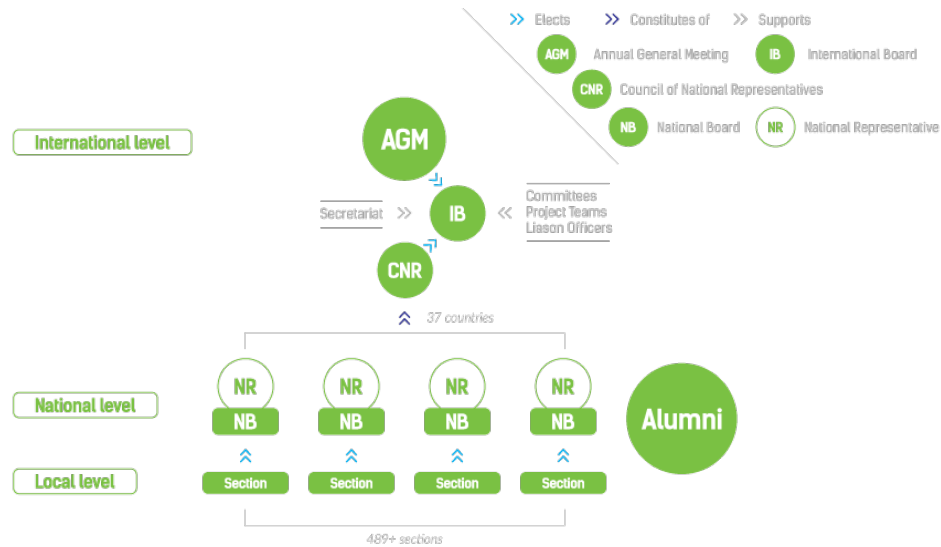


Figure 8: Structure of ESN, Klimacki, et al., 2015

#### Strengths:

- Size of the organisation
- Passionate volunteers
- Diversity of the volunteers background

#### Weaknesses:

- Bottom-up structure
- Gap between international and local level
- Length of the member lifecycle and knowledge transfer

## 3.2 Outer environment

In order to better understand the usage of ESN's communication channels, it is important to start with the environment the organisation finds itself in.

### 3.2.1 PEST analysis

#### 3.2.1.1 Political factors

ESN as an organisation performs majority of its activities in the field of higher education and higher education mobility. There are several trends that put pressure for innovation and changes on the **biggest stakeholder in the field of higher education mobility—the European Commission**. The higher education itself has undergone immense changes in the last years, the biggest change over time being accessibility. Until the 20th century, university education catered for tiny elites. The 19th century universities saw the model cater for a

system in which perhaps 2% of the population entered university. On the contrary, the European Union has as its stated ambition the goal of 40% of all young people having graduated from higher education by 2020.

In its strategy on the modernisation of higher education (European Commission, 2011), the Commission highlighted the need to provide more opportunities for students to gain skills through study or training abroad. The EU target for overall student mobility is **at least 20% by the end of the decade**. Currently, around 10% of EU students study or train abroad with the support of Erasmus or other public and private means.

Erasmus is not just a funding scheme for student and staff exchanges: it also supports joint projects, summer schools and networks, with the aim of improving how education is delivered so that it meets the needs of the labour market and society as a whole.

ESN works in close cooperation with the European Commission (European Commission, 2013) and is considered to be a valuable partner in disseminating information about the features of the new Erasmus+ programme. ESN is also very active in the field of research and advocacy to ensure better and more mobility in the European Higher Education Area. ESN's International Committee for education spots obstacles and motivations for students to go abroad, tries to detect solutions and lobbies in Europe to ensure that detrimental factors are reduced and favourable components are increased (Erasmus Student Network, 2015).

On the national and local the most common stakeholders are National Agencies (acting as service providers for international mobility) and universities, both of which very closely follow the aforementioned vision of the European Commission to reach 20% of mobile students by the year 2020. This opens interesting opportunities to strengthening the cooperation with the European Commission and the National Agencies for the future and more options to prove the importance of ESN in the political environment.

Opportunities:

- Great variety of different mobility programmes

### **3.2.1.2 Economic factors**

ESN benefits greatly from public grants supporting both project and administrative costs. These predominantly come from the European Commission, the Council of Europe and the Belgian state. Unlike many NGOs comparable to

ESN a majority of incomes do not come from public grants supporting operating expenses, but rather from commercial partnerships, projects and membership fees. This represents a strategic cornerstone of ESN: to be self-sustainable and independent (Klimacki, et al., 2015).

ESN received several important grants to run new projects in the year 2015, 2016, and 2017. These will allow for further expansion of the organisation's impact and will also require more human resources to execute the upcoming projects. This strategy is closely related to communications as all of these projects will have to be communicated to the relevant target groups.

Opportunities:

- Grants support for NGOs dealing with mobility

### **3.2.1.3 Sociologic factors**

An extraordinary generation of people is on the rise. Generation of people who have had a life-changing experience and who are strategic for Europe's future. Not only former Erasmus, but everyone that has lived abroad a significant period of their life during their studies. These people represent the first integrated generation of Europeans: the Erasmus Generation.

Even though there are warning signs present in the society; anti-EU parties in European and national elections – notably in the UK, France, Spain, Greece and Denmark – reflecting discontent with the main parties and scepticism towards the European project, studies like (ThinkYoung, 2015) and (European Union, 2014) speak of a generation that believes in the European project, has a wish for further unity, and is enthusiastic about its future potential.

Being a mobile person is becoming more and more important in the working life as well and is proved to boost employability: 64% of employers consider an international experience as important for recruitment, on average 92% are looking for transversal skills such as openness to and curiosity about new challenges, problem-solving and decision-making skills, confidence, tolerance towards other personal values and behaviours (European Union, 2014). More than one in three Erasmus students who did a job placement abroad were hired or offered a position by their host company and the unemployment rate of Erasmus students five years after their exchange is 23% lower than the average (European Union, 2014).

The mobile lifestyle also affects the personal lives of the Erasmus students: 93% of mobile students can easily imagine living abroad in the future, compared

to 73% of their stay-at-home counterparts and a third of Erasmus alumni have a life partner with a different nationality than theirs.

All this data show a big change in perceiving international lifestyle which strongly supports ESN's vision of enriching the society through international students. On the other hand the growing hatred against immigration and foreigners (International Business Times, 2014) pose a direct threat for the beliefs ESN is fighting for.

Opportunities:

- Rising interest in mobility lifestyle
- Greater European integration

Threats:

- Anti-immigrant feelings throughout the society

#### **3.2.1.4 Technology factors**

When the Arab Spring erupted in 2010, one of the first things people noticed was the very visible role social media seemed to play. Many began to call the series of political uprisings "Twitter Revolutions" and a lively debate broke out about the importance of the new technology (Satell, 2014). It is not only revolutions where these new means of communication come in handy.

In a study by (Social Media Examiner, 2014) 92% of marketers said that social media was important for their business. As more businesses adopt platforms like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram to broadcast their brand message, marketing communications are becoming so streamlined that 140 characters or a single picture are becoming the standard container for a message. In the same report 68% of marketers mentioned they plan on increasing their use of blogging in their digital communications.

Yet the communications industry is rapidly changing every year as new platforms rise. In the last years we have seen rapid growth of network we now consider "classic"—Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Yet the upcoming generation searches and is given more ways to communicate than ever before. Platforms like Snapchat and Vine are booming and there are numerous new entrants every single day (Social Hospitality, 2015). 2014 saw the rise of a number of niche social networks, many built specifically in response to the perceived failings of the big boys: the lack of privacy, the collection of demographic and psychographic data, the increasingly pervasive advertising. Newcomers range from Ello, which launched in March with promises to never sell

user data, to Yik Yak, which allows users to exchange fully anonymous posts with people who are physically nearby, and tsu, which has promised to share ad revenue with users based on the popularity of their posts.

All this needs to be considered by the current marketers who need to stay on top of what's hip and explore opportunities to communicate with their target audience using channels they are the most comfortable in.

Opportunities:

- New media platforms to reach the customers with better targeting

Threats:

- Information and content overflow on the current platforms

### **3.2.2 Porter five forces model**

#### **3.2.2.1 Power of suppliers**

Erasmus Student Network keep its workforce on a completely voluntary basis, except for ~10 people working full time in the ESN Headquarters. This brings benefits on the staff cost side of the coin, on the other hand it puts pressure on the HR approach throughout the whole organisation. From the perspective of service and product suppliers, the organisation is fully self-sufficient and does not rely on any suppliers.

Even though there are numerous strategic partnerships established, such as with New Yorker, American Tourister, and others (Klimacki, et al., 2015), these are not crucial for the operations of the organisation. The partnerships are of most importance to ESN due to the opportunities they offer Erasmus and international students around Europe: not only do students have access to quality services and products through the partnerships, but the collaborations also offer students employment and professional development opportunities.

The only real supplier in the sense of this analysis can be the European commission, providing grants that allow the organisation to develop further aspects of representing the Erasmus generation. These grants make up an important portion of the strategic income of the organisation and should they be limited, the organisation would have to slow down its development strategy.

Threats:

- Losing the valuable connection with the European Commission

### **3.2.2.2 The power of buyers**

The buyers of ESN are in fact the exchange students themselves. About 180,000 thousands of them use the services of ESN every year. This group is extremely scattered and there are virtually no chances for the exchange students to collude together to put pressure on the organisation. While they have options to obtain similar services elsewhere, ESN usually comes out on top thanks to its personal students-helping-students approach.

Strengths:

- Personal students-helping-students approach

### **3.2.2.3 Threat of new entrants**

The industry has very low entry-level costs on the field on providing leisure activities to students and on the local level there are numerous companies trying to get in the niche every year. These usually target the exchange students with party promotion, which in the result harms the overall image of the Erasmus+ programme. This poses a reasonable threat to the local-level parts of ESN, where the direct contact and providing services to the students is priority number one, whilst maintaining a favourable image of the programme to the Higher Education Institutes.

On the international level and on the level of promoting and advocating for mobility on the European level the barriers to entry are significantly more prominent, as to establish a voice that is heard on the various departments of the European commission is very time-consuming and requires deep knowledge about the issue.

Threats:

- Party-oriented subjects reaching out to exchange students

### **3.2.2.4 Threat of substitutes**

Erasmus+ exchange is not the only way to mobile lifestyle of course, even though during its transformation in 2014 it immensely widened its scope, by unifying long- and short-term mobility of students, mobility of university staff, Erasmus+ internships, and many others. The biggest limitation of ESN is the limitation of Erasmus+ programme itself—it's mainly targeted at European countries. The students who want to spend their mobility exchange outside of Europe are forced to seek help of other organisations as ESN can't be of service in these situations.



ESN is currently discussing an expansion strategy focused on long-term solution of this issue by expanding outside of the borders of EHEA<sup>2</sup> to offer services to students who don't spend their mobility in Europe.

Opportunities:

- Expansion outside of the EHEA

### **3.2.2.5 Rivalry among competitors**

The competing companies usually appear on the local level of the organisation as was mentioned before. These companies tend to be young, agile, and very flexible in their moral code, often most trying to harm the reputation of the ESN sections in order to attract as many students as they can to events they are organising. The competition at certain points escalates to almost-open business conflict, where both parties are accusing each other, performing price wars, and eventually forgetting their primary target—to help and provide services to the exchange students.

Threats:

- Business practices of the commercial subjects

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<sup>2</sup> European Higher Education Area

### 3.3 Stakeholders

ESN's stakeholders can be broken down into several categories. On the first level there are students, government institutions, commercial partners, and members of ESN. Students can be further broken down into local and exchange students, government institutions comprise of directly and indirectly involved with mobility programmes, commercial partners can be divided into local, national, and international in their level of involvement, just as members of ESN.

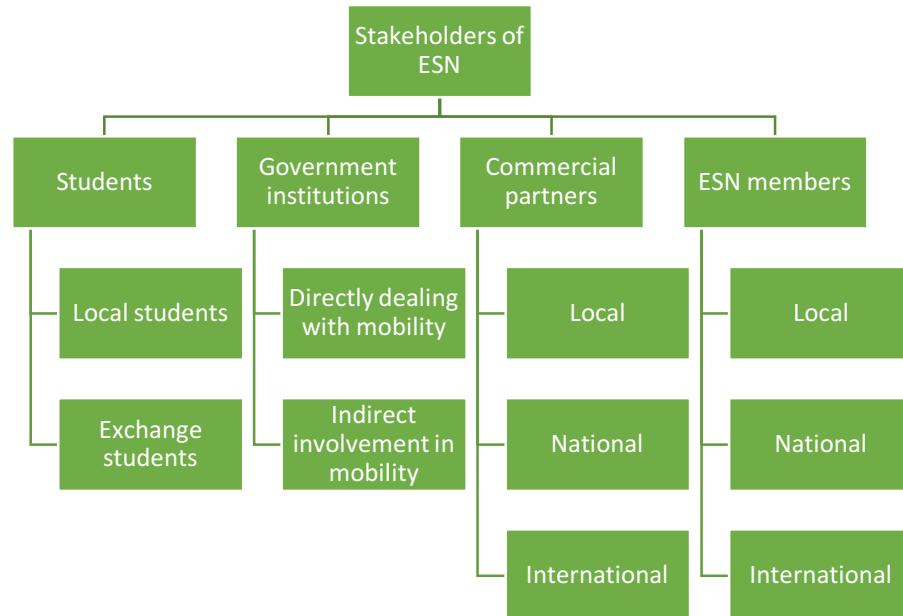


Figure 9: Stakeholders breakdown, author's findings

## 3.4 Organisation's digital communication channels

### 3.4.1 Website

The landing page of ESN's website looks as following:



Figure 10: ESN landing page, esn.org

The main parts are the navigation menu which provides very clear separation of topics for the user, ranging from all content for students to description of ESN's projects and more information about the company itself.

The jumbo carousel shows highlighted information, both from inside of the network and from external relations. Clicking on the carousel takes the user to a page with more information on the topic, this is however **not supported by any call-to-action button in the carousel**.

The "Latest news" section shows updates on the organisations activities, however this part is not really active, during time of this research, only 4 posts were made during the month of July. Two of the four articles on the front page are missing a thumbnail which may confuse the user with its topicality in regard to the other articles.

The about section provides basic information on the organisation itself and is nicely followed by icons leading to several social media channels, which can be seen as the **only call-to-action on the landing page**.

The pages attract on average around 80,000 sessions per month and overall provide relevant and structured information, providing the user is willing to click his/her way through the menus, which is where majority (**almost 60%, which is above optimal**) of the users get lost, not continuing from the landing page, as shown in the Google Analytics report below (with landing page data highlighted):

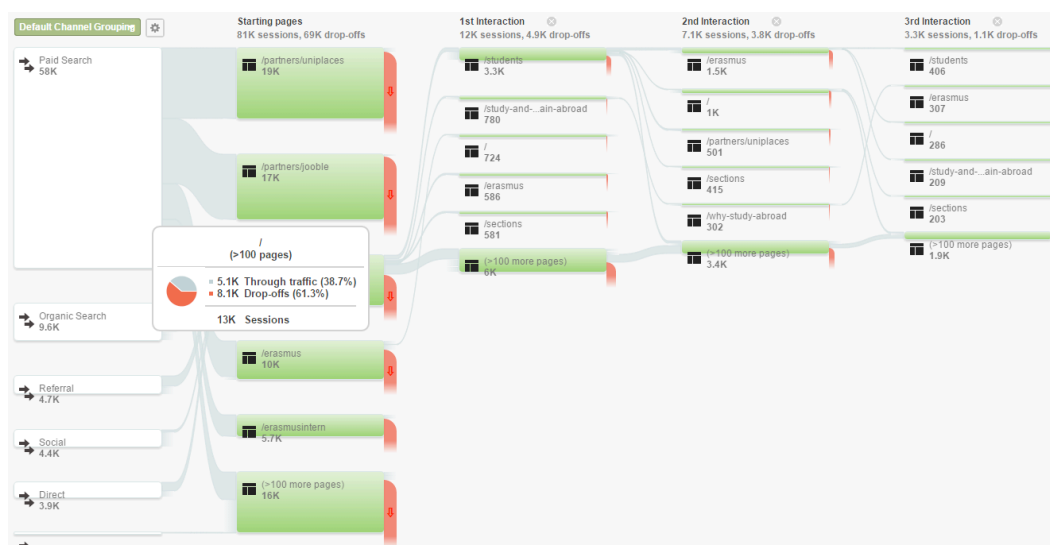


Figure 11: ESN's Customer Flow diagram, Google Analytics

Two biggest entry points for the website—partner pages which are strongly promoted through CPC advertising from the partner obligation budget—show an alarming 94% and 96% drop-off rate, meaning that the content showing the partner of the page is leading the users away from ESN’s website. In order to keep these customers on the website, a change in the structure of content for the partner pages needs to be made.

### 3.4.2 Newsletter

ESN sends out a monthly newsletter highlighting news in the network. This newsletter is primarily sent to members of the network and is **targeted internally with almost 25,000 subscribers**, even though there are about 5% external subscribers. The newsletter is sent in two-stage approach, with a short hook sent in email with a link to a full version hosted on the website. The mailed

version looks as following:

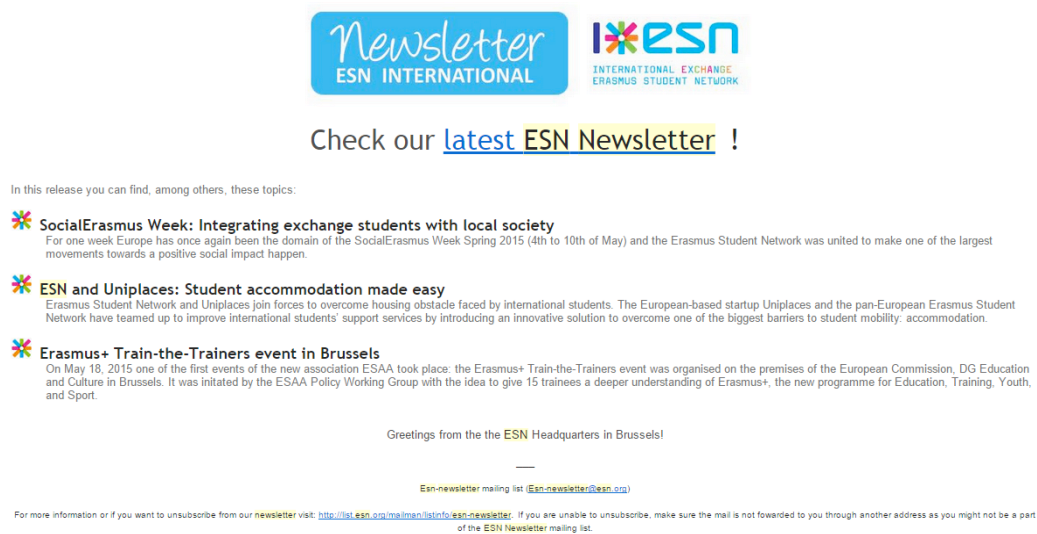


Figure 12: ESN Newsletter in mail, company archive

The email is sent in pure text format, with only basic styling applied. This makes it relatively fool-proof against different email clients, however limits the readability and the information flow of the email. **The line-length is way over the 65 character limit** recommended by (Bringhurst, 1992). Furthermore, there are images missing to support the message in each section (Hexton, 2013). Lastly, the CTA button is placed above its supporting content which might confuse the reader having to move up and down the page against the natural flow of reading. The opening rate of these emails **are not tracked** and it is **therefore impossible to optimise the email for analysis of how many users receive the email in their spam folder or don't open it at all.**

The full version of the newsletter as seen on the website is show below:

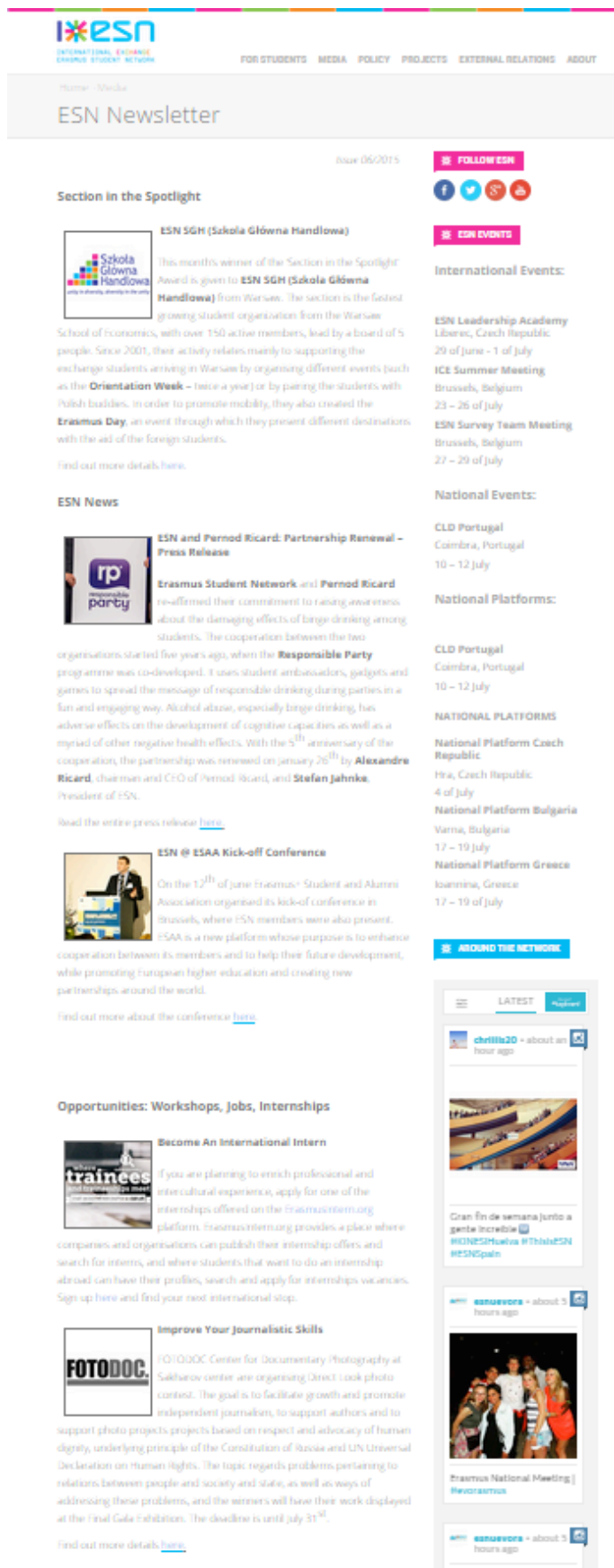


Figure 13: ESN newsletter on web, company archive

The structure here is much more prominent. Several categories such as Section in the Spotlight (showing a selected top-class example for the local level), ESN News, Opportunities, and Partners (not shown on the image) divide the content into logical blocks, while each piece of content provides short description about the topic supported by a thumbnail image. In the sidebar column the user can find upcoming events from the international and national level and also selection of current images gathered from around the network.

The text in this case is **much more readable**, which is supported by above-average session time, as shown in the analytics below:

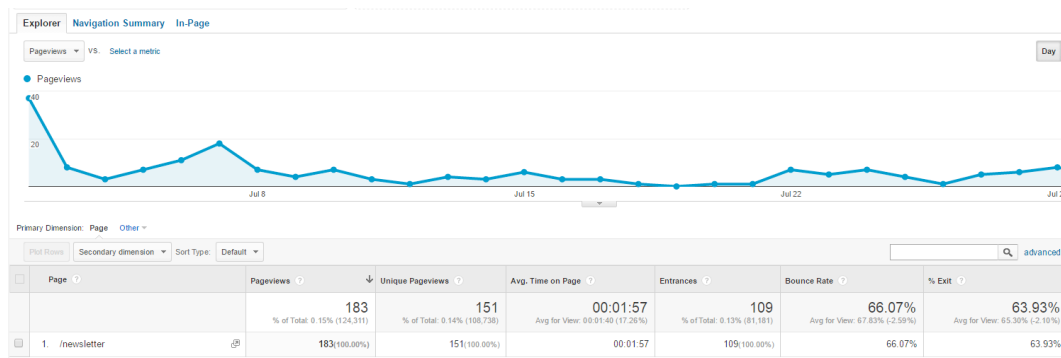


Figure 14: ESN Newsletter webpage analytics, company archive

From the same statistics, the newsletter however **reaches unsatisfactory level of CTR, creating only 151 new sessions during the month of July**. This concludes an alarming 0.6% CTR<sup>3</sup>.

### 3.4.3 Facebook

Facebook of ESN is definitely one of the strongest presence among all the communication channels. The page has over 250,000 fans and is enjoying constant growth of over 1000 fans every week.

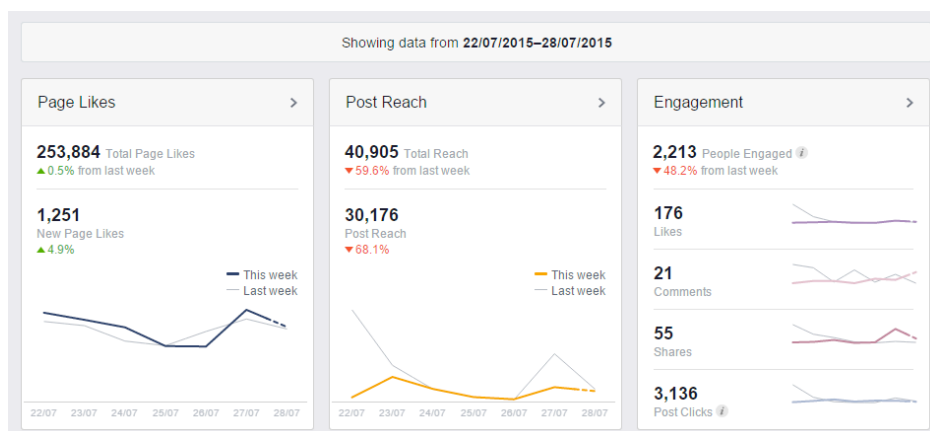


Figure 15: ESN Facebook insights, company archive

<sup>3</sup> Click-through rate

The page posts several posts a week, ranging from news from the network, motivational posts about mobility, career opportunities, and partner posts. On average these posts **reach to between 50,000 to 100,000 people a week**, while **around 5,000 reached people engage** with the posts.

However, posts that tap deep into the mentality of the fans can reach up to 250,000 people, engaging almost 4,000 of them at once, as illustrated below:

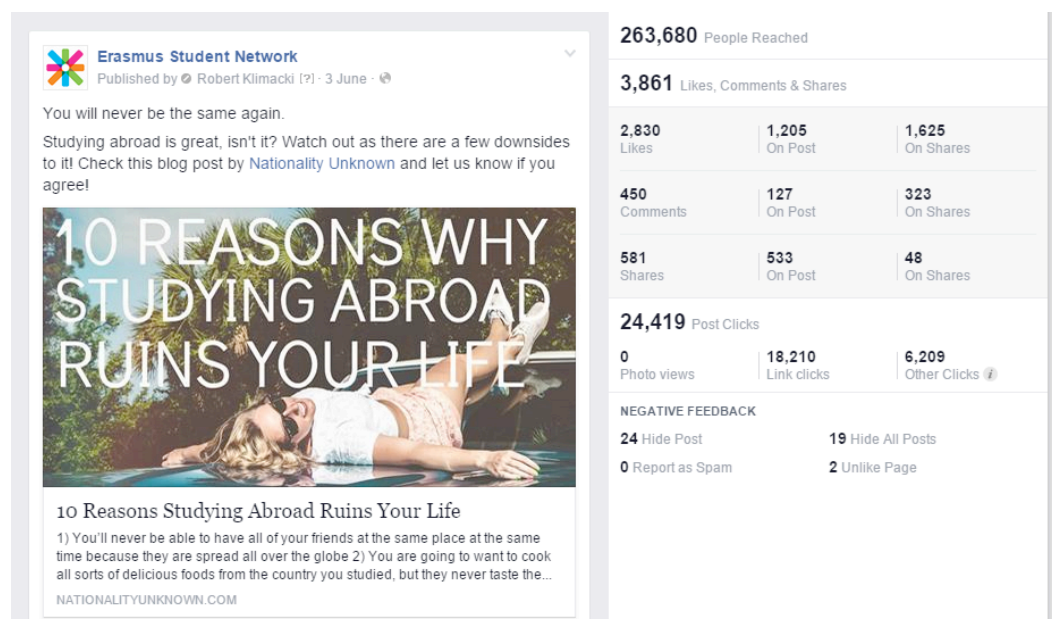


Figure 16: Successful Facebook post, company archive

In general, the Facebook page is mostly oriented on the young travelling fans, delivering motivational and informational content. There is a lack of storytelling approach identifiable, where the communication is **not run in logical blocks or campaigns**, but rather at random, **trying to be flexible and react on the current events** happening in the company environment.

Other Facebook channels include an informal group with over 5000 members of the network, which is mainly used for informing members throughout all the levels of the organisation about current events in a relaxed and laid-back format, and a couch surfing group which was recently established to accommodate for the rising need of members to have a chance to ask their colleagues from different cities and countries on tips about accommodation when they are travelling.

All the posts by the page are **organic** and there is **no budget for boosting** the posts. Only posts that are posted based on a partner obligation contract are boosted. The organisation also **doesn't use the opportunity to create targeted ads**.



### 3.4.4 Twitter

The Twitter presence of ESN is strictly targeted at external subjects, mostly in the field of mobility advocacy. The account is **reaching 10,000 followers** and the tweets reach between 25,000 and 40,000 impressions a month. The amount of tweets produced is **extremely low, ranging between 5 and 20 tweets per month**. Due to the original activity, the account doesn't get mentioned that often, in the 6 month average it only reached 150 mentions per month. This number grows rapidly whenever there is an event organised by ESN international and people are actively suggested to tweet mentioning the profile @ESN\_int.

The overall statistics for the last month are gathered in the Twitter analytics:



Figure 17: ESN Twitter analytics, company archive

The topics tweeted about mostly include formal news from the network, offers on work positions in the ESN secretariat, updates from ESN events, and partner updates all in a **very formal and one-way interaction manner**. Tweets are usually composed as announcements and don't really explore the true power of Twitter – creating conversations.

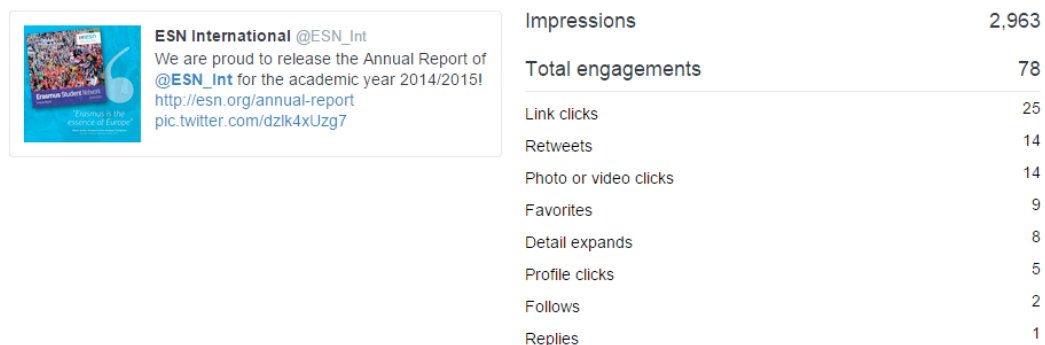


Figure 18: Top tweet for July, company archive

There is no use of Twitter ads and the budget for this marketing arm is currently equal to zero. In general the target audience for Twitter is very clearly defined in the company's approach to the communication channel—to reach relevant high-class individuals in mobility advocacy—yet in practice the variety of posts doesn't engage with the specified target audience and mostly reaches general members of the network who then retweet the posts to their own followers.

### 3.4.5 YouTube

The video channel of the organisation was revived in 2014 with introduction of the ESN Video Team, a group of volunteers focusing solely on producing high quality videos for the network. The channel is currently serving over 1300 subscribers. There are 20 original productions created since then, **targeted mostly at young students**, providing information and motivation about mobility programmes, internship and traineeship opportunities, and recently also updates from within the network in the news casting format. The top 10 watched videos are shown in a table:

| Top 10 Videos   |               | Browse all content           |          |
|---|---------------|------------------------------|----------|
| Video   | Views ?       | Estimated minutes watched* ? | Likes* ? |
| <a href="#">We are Mov'in Europe - Once Erasmus, Always...</a>      | 48,655 (29%)  | 83,754 (33%)                 | 479      |
| <a href="#">Get your Erasmus Encore   Join the Erasmus ...</a>      | 31,871 (19%)  | 42,466 (17%)                 | 205      |
| <a href="#">#THISisESN - the Erasmus Student Network</a>            | 23,262 (14%)  | 44,908 (18%)                 | 195      |
| <a href="#">PRIME student guide to full recognition</a>             | 12,495 (7.4%) | 19,252 (7.6%)                | 42       |
| <a href="#">ErasmusIntern.org   Where trainees and trainee...</a>   | 6,595 (3.9%)  | 3,910 (1.5%)                 | 14       |
| <a href="#">Icelandic Dreams - An Erasmus Story (Series ...</a>     | 4,569 (2.7%)  | 6,947 (2.7%)                 | 39       |
| <a href="#">ESN SocialErasmus   Erasmus Student Netwo...</a>        | 4,381 (2.6%)  | 9,165 (3.6%)                 | 28       |
| <a href="#">Take the first step abroad!   25 years of the Er...</a> | 3,470 (2.1%)  | 2,759 (1.1%)                 | 12       |
| <a href="#">Mov'in Europe: Become an Ambassador!   Era...</a>       | 2,901 (1.7%)  | 5,321 (2.1%)                 | 27       |
| <a href="#">SocialErasmus   Project by the Erasmus Stude...</a>     | 2,819 (1.7%)  | 2,123 (0.8%)                 | 13       |

Figure 19: ESN's top 10 YouTube videos, company archive

The highlights of the channel are videos “Once Erasmus, always Erasmus”—promoting the way mobility becomes a lifestyle for this generation, “Erasmus Encore”—inviting the people coming back from their Erasmus to join ESN and prolong their Erasmus feeling, and “#THISisESN”—showing the biggest strength of the organisation; Unity in diversity.



Figure 20: ESN's top 3 videos, company archive

These three videos amassed more views—in the last year—than the rest of the channel altogether in its whole lifetime. They are **perfectly targeted at a**

**specific niche of ESN's target groups** and all content is delivered in a way that it taps deep into the feeling of the target group. There is strong focus on a storytelling aspect, rather than announcing information. All these aspects show the impact a specifically targeted piece of content can have.

Apart from the externally oriented content the channel contains a variety of unlisted videos created for opportunities like the International Board addressing the members of a country during their National Platform with a thank-you speech, live reports from the international events, and others. These videos—even though they don't reach tens of thousands of viewers—play an important role in bringing the network closer to each other and bridging the gap between the international and the national and local level.

### 3.4.6 Instagram

The Instagram account is **targeted at the members of ESN and the general youth**, shows completely informal content (usually in the style of behind-the-curtain information) and reaches to the users in a way of showing the human touch in the company environment. The channel reaches to almost 2000 followers while the frequency of posting is rather low—in the last month the account published only 4 posts.

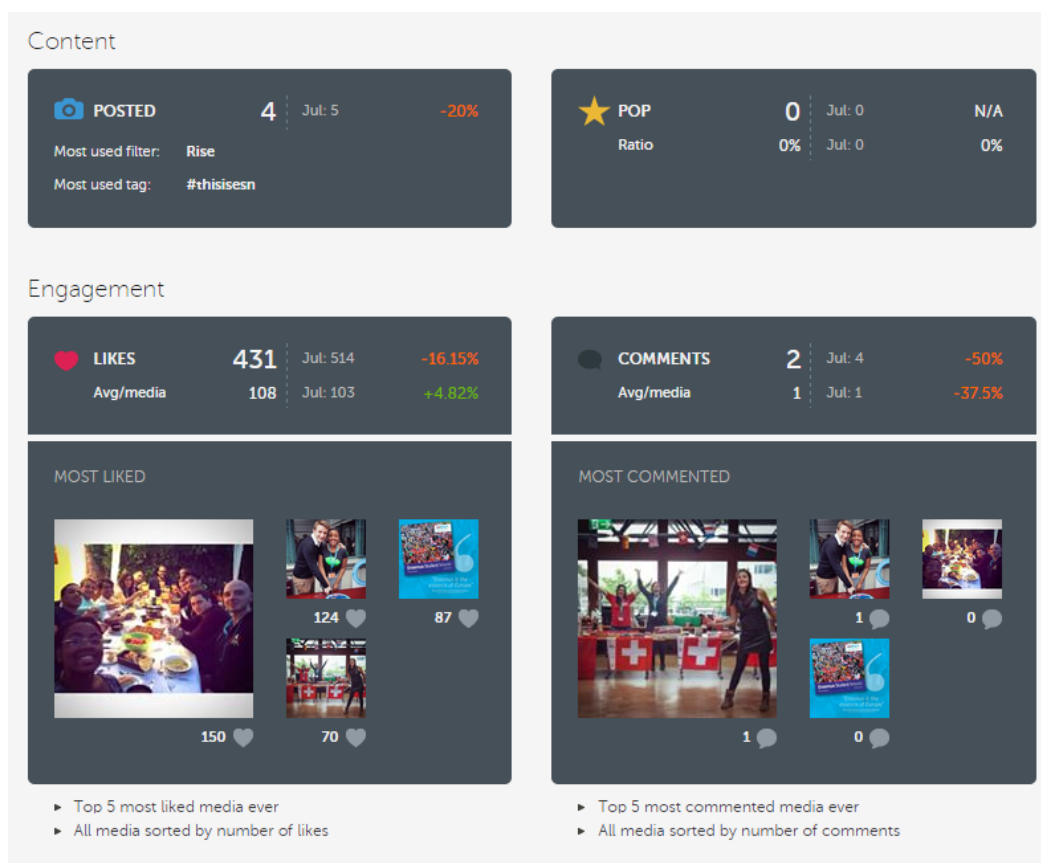
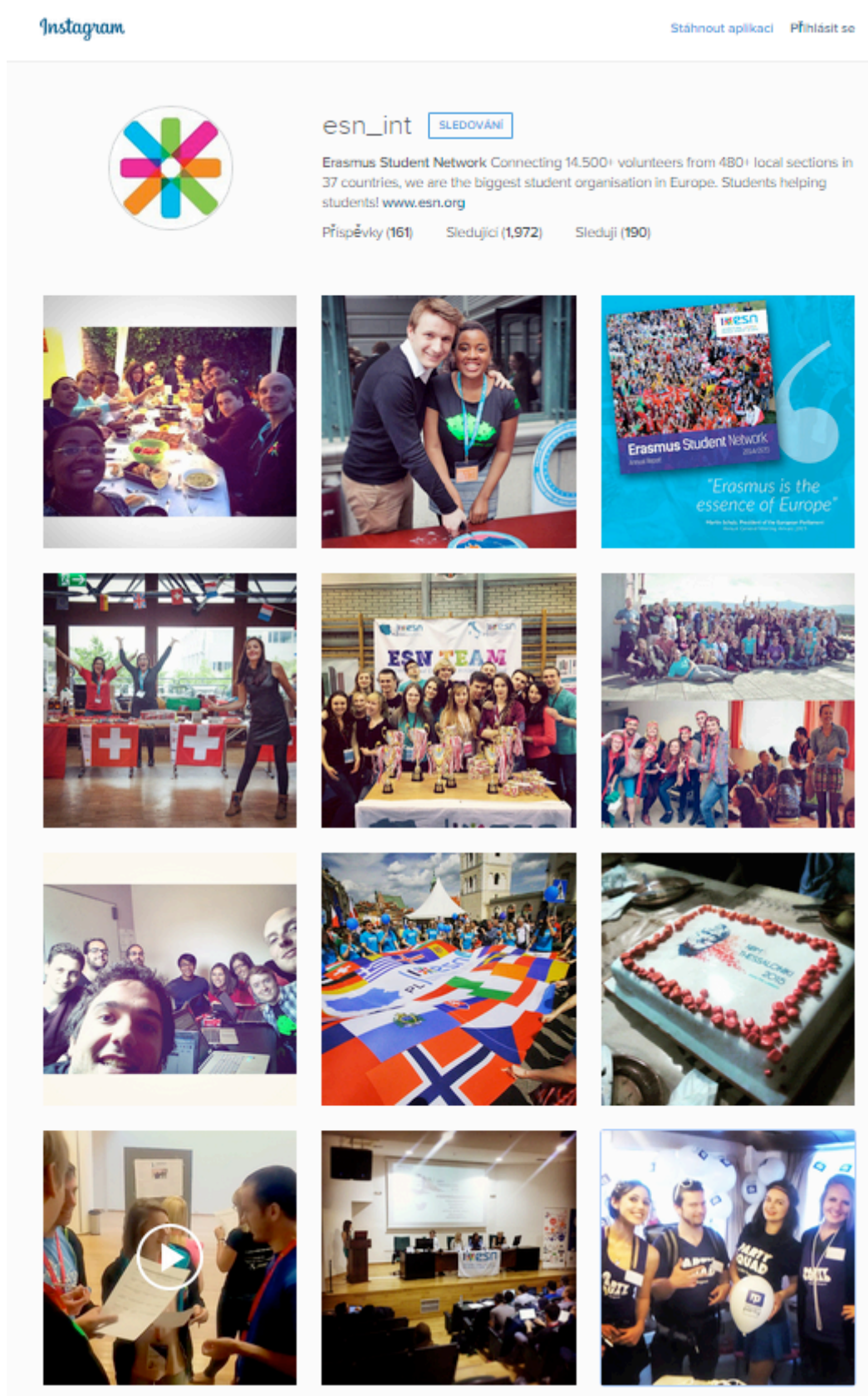


Figure 21: ESN's Instagram statistics, company archive

The feed looks as following:



### **3.5 Summary of the status quo**

Based on the results of the environment and SWOT analysis it is apparent that the company is having a strong position thanks to its size and historical value for the important government partners. This focused approach to partnerships is obvious in the targeting of the website content, where almost 2/3 of the incoming traffic come through CPC advertisements for the specific partner pages.

The company excels in reach and engagement through almost every channel when it focuses on creation of original content, not only announcing information. This however happens rather randomly and there is no content strategy visible to be guiding the digital efforts as a whole. Majority of the content is put online with no clear goal in mind regarding conversion or guidance of the user through the customer funnel.

With the weakness having its roots in the company's organisational structure—the gap between the international and the local level—there is clear need for showing highlights happening in the network not only to external users but also internally to all its members.

In order to reach full potential of its content strategy it is important that a unifying message is carried across all channels in the content creation and that all of the efforts lead to clear CTAs or referrals which then take the user deeper into the main contact point—the website. These links have to be part of the analytics and effectivity of each effort needs to be tracked in order to effectively allocate the already scarce resources of the company.

All in all, a unified content strategy with clearly defined goals for conversion is gravely needed.



## **3.6 SWOT analysis**

### **3.6.1 Strengths**

The biggest power of the organisation lies in its regional coverage. To sum up, currently operating in 37 countries on more than 489 higher education institutions, ESN groups together 14,500 active members in wide variety of expertise and another 15,000 passionate mentors who are in direct contact with 180,000 exchange students year (Klimacki, et al., 2015). The organisation keeps a steady growing rate allowing to accommodate for growing numbers of exchange students thanks to the more inclusive strategy of the new Erasmus+ programme (European Commission, 2014).

No other organisation dealing with mobility and exchange students managed to grow into such size and have this much regional impact. This puts ESN into a very strong position regarding its partners and customers.

The next identified strength are the volunteers themselves. As mentioned before, ESN operates on a wide range of universities, gathering students whose major varies from political sciences to pharmaceutical research. This brings plenty of fresh ideas and approaches into the organisation and allows for exploration of synergies on cultural, educational, professional, and personal level. Thanks to this variety ESN has extremely flexible and responsive managerial level which is more than capable of adapting to the ever-changing business environment.

The organisation's Facebook presence is definitely its biggest strength regarding the communication channels. The audience is large and engaged and positively responds to the content being published on the channel.

Another strength point lies in the proactive promotion of the Twitter account during the international events. The volunteers are prompted to share their stories under unified hashtags and their efforts reach to normally unreachable groups of people.

### **3.6.2 Weaknesses**

On the other hand, it's exactly the volunteering inclusive approach that can prove very dangerous for long-term planning of the organisation. The slowest rate of change for the organisation is a 2-year-long cycle in which a new International Board has to be elected. This cycle is usually much shorter on the national and local level of the organisation and requires careful approach to HR in both hiring and retaining current members.

It is not uncommon that a person gains skills and contacts in ESN and swiftly leaves the organisation to join the corporate sector. Other issue lies with the focus on the students, where many skilled members leave the organisation after their graduation and take all their experience and knowledge with them. It is crucial on all levels of the organisation that the people leaving—either further up in the organisation's structure or outside of the organisation—are retained to share their knowledge not only to the structure they are leaving but also to other structures across the whole network.

The last major issue is the structure of the organisation itself. Due to its bottom-up structure (as shown in figure 8) there is a big informational distance created between the international and the local level. The sections usually don't have a good overview of what is currently being dealt with on the international level and see only the requests that are coming from top.

The weakest points in the communication channels are definitely the newsletter and the YouTube channel. While both can reach to vast amount of subscribers, the efforts put into producing content for them is not even nearly rewarded in performance of the channels. The newsletter is produced by several people in a period of one month while reaching 0.6% CTR. Similarly, the videos produced for the YouTube channel can perform very well—when clearly targeted at students with motivational content—however when producing informational content they perform poorly.

Another weak points lies in the amount of content posted on almost every channel except Facebook. There are many opportunities to reach to more students—especially cross-promoting content through more channels—which are not taken advantage of.

### **3.6.3 Opportunities**

The European Commission considers ESN to be a valuable partner for dissemination of its projects among students. Being the organisation that provides the biggest opportunity for mobility to students and your adults this provides immense opportunities for future cooperation. ESN has cooperated on several important research grants (Erasmus Student Network, 2015) which strengthened the position as an important research in the field of mobility and mobility recognition.

More grants are in the negotiations for the year 2015/2016 and should these be accepted, they would allow for creation of more professional and paid

positions in the ESN Secretariat which in the end leads to professionalization of the organisation's services.

Another big opportunity is the rising interest in the European politics—especially those including the mobility issues—among the current youth (European Commission, 2013). The Erasmus generation is not afraid to communicate with politicians using the modern communication channels. Providing ESN manages to tackle, express opinions, and show progress with issues that the youth finds pressing, the organisation could significantly increase its reach in these communities.

Last but not least, the introduction of Erasmus+ programme made the programme much more inclusive, bringing more opportunities to students and staff who couldn't enjoy the programme before. Properly disseminating these opportunities can lead to more interest in the mobility exchanges and more interest in the ESN's services.

#### **3.6.4 Threats**

There are two major threats to the organisation itself, each coming from a completely different angle. The first one being the competing organisations on the local level. As mentioned in the chapter 3.2.2.5, these companies are profit-driven, often most very aggressive in their business practices, and their sole focus is on the party aspect of the Erasmus lifestyle. This can potentially seriously harm the image of the mobility exchange programmes in the eyes of all the stakeholders and lead to significant limitations in the mobility programmes.

The second threat is the position of society to foreigners coming to the country, as mentioned in the chapter 3.2.1.3. ESN as an organisation promoting mobile lifestyle of course supports free movement and people, labour, and services. During the current months there was a growing number of incidents; conflicts between the exchange and the local students where ESN was accused of being directly responsible.

#### **3.6.5 SWOT matrix**

In general, the internal weaknesses identified are mainly related to issues with internal communication. The strengths and opportunities are mostly related to the current status of the organisation and there is no specific need for exploiting these. The threats coming from the external environment could be reduced in impact—should they happen—by correctly and effectively educating all level of the organisation about the goals and progress within. It is therefore important to



include the internal communication in the overall communication strategy within the WT approach (reduce weaknesses to avoid threats).

The findings of the SWOT analysis are summarised in a matrix below:

| STRENGTHS  | OPPORTUNITIES   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Size of the organisation</li> <li>• Volunteer basis</li> <li>• Variety of members' expertise</li> <li>• Personal students-helping-students approach</li> <li>• Facebook presence</li> <li>• Twitter engagement during international events</li> </ul>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grants</li> <li>• Rising interest in mobility politics</li> <li>• New opportunities to be mobile</li> <li>• New media platforms to reach the customers with better targeting</li> <li>• Expansion outside of the EHEA</li> </ul>               |
| WEAKNESSES   | THREATS   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Length of member lifecycle</li> <li>• Knowledge transfer between members</li> <li>• Gap between international and local level</li> <li>• Newsletter impact</li> <li>• YouTube production time</li> <li>• Amount of content produced in fast-paced channels</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competing organisations' business practices</li> <li>• Society's approach to foreigners</li> <li>• Losing the valuable connection with the European Commission</li> <li>• Information and content overflow on the current platforms</li> </ul> |

Figure 22: SWOT matrix, author's findings

## 4 Proposals for improvement

### 4.1 Objective

The vision of the organisation as mentioned above—enrichment of society through international students—defines the efforts of the whole organisation. This should also be reflected in the overarching goal of its communication strategy. Due to the organisation’s size and impact on the generation of people in different stages of their mobility life, a similar goal is proposed to aim its communication for:

*“Become the voice of the Erasmus generation.”*

This brand message needs to be present in any piece content created to create a fully unified look and feel of the company’s communication. To position itself as the “voice” aims for **building a brand that is considered to be the one-stop-shop for all mobility** happening in Europe. From helping the students face-to-face on the local level to advocacy to European politicians on the international level, a message of fighting for the rights and quality of life of mobile students’ needs to be present.

The specific content focus for the content strategy is:

- Motivate students to study, work, and live abroad
- Inform students about the possibilities of mobility programmes
- Show the highlights and benefits of activities organised within the network to externals as well as members of the organisation
- Show the organisation’s opinion on mobility legislation development and engage into a conversation about it
- Promote ESN as a trustworthy partner to the commercial subjects

The overarching conversion of the content strategy is to bring the users to ESN’s website through various entry points. The conversion goals are specific for each target group and are closely related to the customer needs as show further. The implementation will rely solely on the work of volunteers within the network and **needs to be implemented using practically zero budget**—the organisation’s budget policy doesn’t allow for re-allocation of money towards promotion. KPIs are hence expressed in metrics that show success within the targeted group and are also different for each target group and each communication channel.

## 4.2 Target groups

In order to be able to properly construct the content strategy, it is important to take the general stakeholder breakdown chart shown in chapter 3.4 and drill deeper.

The general demography of the target groups can be taken from the organisation's Facebook insights as they provide the biggest sample (over 250,000 fans).

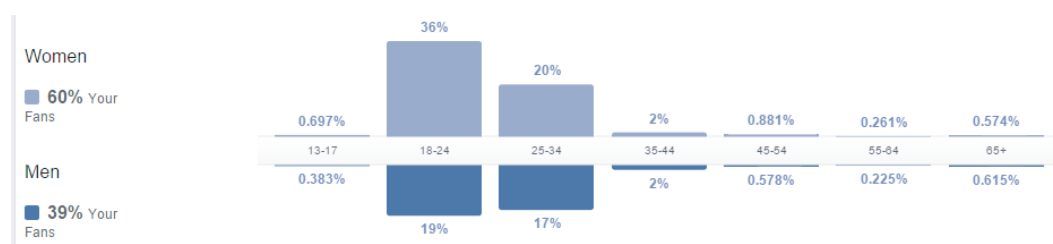


Figure 23: ESN's Facebook demographics

More than 75% percent of fans are between the ages 18-24 which is expectable for a company targeting students. What is however interesting is the predominance of women (60% of the whole) which also aligns with findings of the (European Commission, 2014). Directing branded content at women is about connecting with them and encouraging dialogue around issues they feel are important, as well as connection on an individual level around personal passion points (Kennedy, 2013). The importance of story-telling and tapping into emotions from attraction to conversion hence becomes even more important.

### 4.2.1 Students

The students were divided into two categories—local and exchange students—which from the perspective of creating content requires more categories. While the difference between local and exchange students is obvious, in order to explore further categories it is important to have a look at their position in the customer lifecycle (Halligan & Shah, 2009). Four groups were found in this way:

#### 4.2.1.1 Students not knowing what mobility is

Albeit the apparent popularity of the Erasmus+ programme there is still a big group of students present who have never stumbled approach the mobility programmes opportunities. The programme is eligible usually since the second year at a university so there is a big opportunity that the first-year students will not have experience with the programme.

Second aspect significant for this group is aversion to change and foreigners. Especially among students whose origin is in a smaller town there is an apparent feeling against foreigners (International Business Times, 2014). During their university life they usually keep inside a group of friends formed in their hometown and are not open to change and new possibilities

The needs of this group towards the organisation can be summarised as following:

- Learn about the different programmes and what they offer
- Overcome the boundaries and prejudices he has formed about foreigners

On the other hand, the pain points keeping this group from interaction with ESN are:

- Friends' attitude and peer pressure
- The level of knowledge of foreign cultures
- Laziness and lack of proactivity

#### **4.2.1.2 Students not sure about the benefits of mobility**

Another big group of hesitant students is not sure about the academic quality of studying abroad. Study period in a foreign country can often bring additional pressure on the students who have to repeat their courses even though they already passed them abroad. Students consider these issues to be a big barrier to their mobility exchange, as shown in (Alfranseder, 2014).

This group of students put great importance on quality of their education and also on time limitations of their studies—as they don't want to prolong their studies just because an exchange abroad. There is also a fear factor prominent—being alone in a foreign country without friends and family can be intimidating.

Their needs are:

- Information about quality study programmes
- Feeling secure in a foreign country
- Be able to find assurance about their decision

The pain points are directly connected with the study needs show above:

- Discouraging parents
- “Erasmus party lifestyle” image
- Recognition of study programme abroad
- Not knowing how will she be accepted in a new group of friends

#### **4.2.1.3 Students waiting for their mobility to start**

The period between being accepted for the programme and actually leaving for the mobility exchange is full of doubt and information-seeking. The students are interested in anything from accommodation to culture tips and are keen on gaining as much information about the country/city/university they are going to.

Students are usually already looking for an entrance point to a community already from their home and are curious about the people they are going to spend their time with. While some can be familiar with the culture and customs of the country they are going to, the culture shock always happens and it is valuable for ESN to prepare the students for the shock as much as possible.

The needs of these students are:

- Get information and tips about the country they are going to
- Learn the basics of language
- Find accommodation
- Figure out cheap means of travel to, in, and within the country

The pain points at this stage are:

- Budget limitations
- Language barriers
- Hatred towards foreigners in the destination country

#### **4.2.1.4 Students experiencing their mobility**

Upon arrival all the students are introduced into a rapidly forming community. During their stay the students mostly aim on getting the most out of the opportunities of being in a foreign country or region. Travelling, exploring the land and the culture, and meeting new people are often most at the centre of their attention for majority of their time.

In order to achieve these goals the students are searching for experienced guides to show them what they are interested in, preferably in person, and the interest in printed guidebooks is much lower than for regular tourists. The aspect of befriending the locals plays an important role in how interesting do they perceive the places they have visited (Erasmus Student Network, 2007).

The needs of this group are:

- Travel and explore
- Attend events with their international friends
- Befriend the local students
- Practice their language skills with a native speaker

The pain points for these students are:

- Insufficient language skills
- Lack of time to experience all the opportunities
- Complicated access to relevant information

#### **4.2.1.5 Students coming back from their mobility exchange**

Mobility exchange changes people's life (European Union, 2012). People go in an incredibly short time from strangers into a close group of friends which commonly lasts even after their return home. The students are becoming more independent and confident, more valuable in the job market, and learn a wide range of life-skills (European Union, 2014). They discover new cultures, widen their cultural horizons and become more open-minded (Erasmus Student Network, 2007).

There is however a downside to it. After coming back home, many students become saddened being back in their old environment. After experiencing the international lifestyle their hometown suddenly doesn't feel enough. This phenomenon is popularised as the "post-Erasmus depression" while the underlying principle is called "reverse culture shock" (Gaw, 2000).

The students feel restless and are searching for more opportunities to become mobile again. Many of the students who experienced student mobility seek internships and eventually employment abroad as well.

The needs of these students can be summarised as following:

- Keep in touch with their foreign friends
- Remember the good times they had during their exchange
- Find new ways to travel and study abroad
- Get in the Erasmus community at their home university

Their pain points are:

- Lack of knowledge about other programmes
- Sadness
- Having different mind-set than friends at home

#### **4.2.2 Government institutions**

This group of stakeholders was broken down into institutions directly dealing with mobility (such as universities) and indirectly dealing with mobility (such as city governments) in the chapter 3.4. However, for the requirements of the content strategy these two can be considered as one target group due their overlapping expectations in ESN's communications.

The institutions are generally pleased to see that an organisation is helping the foreign students with getting used to the culture and environment, breaking down the language barriers, and assisting them in case any unfortunate events take place. While some institutions have mechanisms taking care of these aspects already in place on their own, overall they are open to collaboration with the organisation.

Their needs are:

- See activities organised for the exchange students and their benefit for the local/global society
- Be assured that exchange students are being taken care of
- See ESN as a professionally organised entity

Their pain points are:

- “Erasmus party lifestyle” image
- Student/volunteering management of the organisation

#### **4.2.3 Commercial partners**

Same situation as with government institutions repeats with commercial partners. Although in the stakeholders analysis they were divided local, national, and international, in regards to the content strategy their needs and pain points are overlapping.

Partners are generally looking to get access to the big market of exchange students by offering their services at a discount rate through Erasmus Student Network’s ESNcard project. They are looking for visibility and brand awareness and in some specific cases also for a sales channel. The level involvement with the discount services varies partner to partner and is vastly different throughout the levels they are involved in, the general concept of the partnership however stays the same.

The needs of the commercial partners are:

- Direct/indirect access to the contacts of exchange students
- Visibility of their brand in promotional materials
- Spot for opening speeches during events organised by ESN

Their pain points are:

- Competition on the market regarding targeting exchange students
- Bottom-up organisation structure and difficulties with disseminating a message from the international level to the national and local
- Interaction with a student-lead organisation

#### **4.2.4 ESN members**

The network due to its structure—as mentioned in chapter 3.1.2—has to face a big gap between the international and the national and local level. The sections are usually focused on the daily operations directly in touch with the exchange students and feel rather detached from the international level as well as other section in foreign countries. However, when given a chance to meet with people from other countries (i.e. during ESN international events), the feedback is almost exclusively positive and the attendees agree that learning about other section's operations is beneficial for them.

This pattern is apparent through all the levels of ESN, there are however certain specifics to each of them and they will be considered separate for the needs of the content strategy.

##### **4.2.4.1 Local ESN members**

A local member is almost exclusively a student, very often after their first mobility experience after which they felt the need to stay connected with the world of exchange students even in their hometown. Although all being volunteers, their motivation to join ESN varies greatly from being in touch with people from the country they spent their exchange in, through searching for ways to develop their skills, to simply gaining advantage in an upcoming mobility exchange selection round at their university.

At first they don't feel strong connection to the organisation and often are not aware of the whole organisational structure and consider the whole concept of ESN national and international overwhelming. As described above the information to the local level is transported through the National representative of a country who then disseminates it through the country's communication channels.

As mentioned in the interview in Appendix 1, majority of the local members are not interested in information coming from the international level unless it concerns their work directly. They see any connection between information coming to them and their daily working tasks.

Their needs can be described as:

- Learn best practices from around the network
- Get to know interesting partner offers
- Gain overview of image and brand of ESN
- Network and make friends

Their pain points are:



- Disinterest in issues of the international level
- Information getting lost or skewed in the transfer
- Frequency of having opportunities to see members from other countries in real life

#### **4.2.4.2 Members of the National Boards**

The national boards are in charge of leading the country-level of ESN and the act as the connection point between the international and local level when it comes to communication. Their biggest responsibility is to stimulate and develop their sections and taking care of their sections is the biggest priority of the national boards. Although their work is much more time-consuming they still are volunteers working for ESN in their free time.

The ongoing theme in all interviews with members of the National Boards of various countries (Appendix 1) is the amount of information coming from the international level. They don't consider the information to be organised in logical blocks but rather chaotic which affects the access to the information provided.

Their needs are:

- Keeping up-to-date with events of ESN international
- Transparency in the information provided and decisions made
- Learn about open calls for various positions within ESN
- Learn about new grant opportunities
- Specific information on how to implement the projects started on the international level

Their pinpoints were identified as:

- Overwhelming amount of information coming from different sources of the international level
- Time-bound nature of their term (most of the national boards are elected for 1 year)
- Majority of the communication is being done online

#### **4.2.4.3 Member of ESN international**

People working on the international level are mostly involved in one of the five committees supporting the International Board positions—International Committee for Education, Network Committee, Finance Committee, Communication Committee, and IT Committee. Small portion of the people are directly involved in execution of various ESN projects as parts of their

international teams. Often most these members are also active in different parts and levels of the network.

The teams and committees have to operate mostly online as they are coming from different countries and only have very limited time to work face-to-face. They greatly benefit from having opportunities to meet not only people from their own teams but also any other opportunity that allows them to consult members of other team and committees.

In general their needs are:

- Stay updated on the work of other teams and committees
- Have a chance to discuss issues for which other members might have a solution
- Get feedback on their work

The pain points for this target group are:

- Majority of communication being done online
- Lack of transparency between the teams
- Level of involvement of members of their teams

### 4.3 Personas creation

Based on the information provided in the previous chapter personas can be created for the described target groups. The personas are hence going to be constructed for:

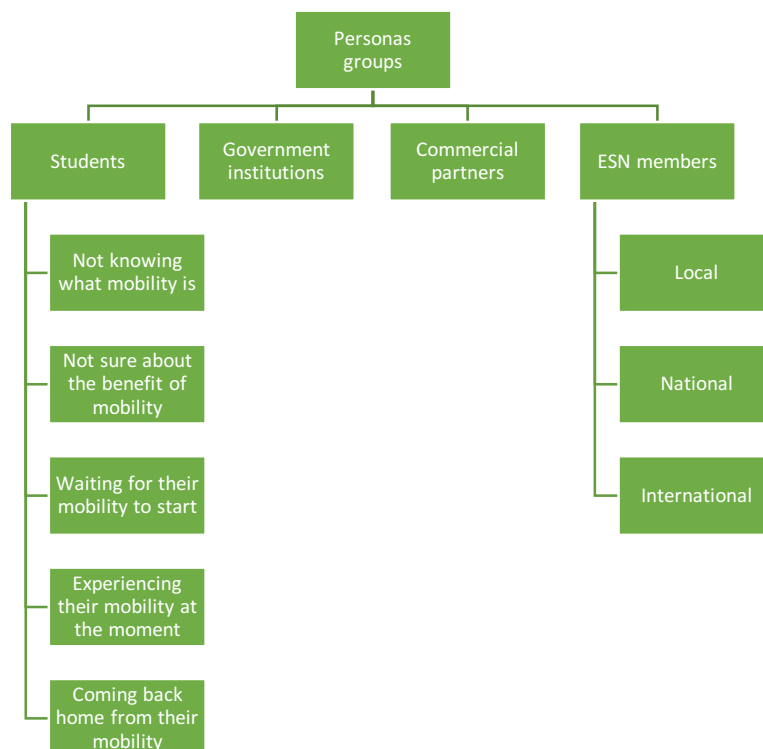


Figure 24: Personas groups, author's findings

The imbalance in the figure clearly relates to the very specific and diverse needs among the students groups in contrast to overlapping needs of different target groups of government institutions and commercial partners.

As mentioned by (Cooper, et al., 2007), the personas need to be given certain “human” characteristics on top of those defined by the demographics and marketing needs. The traits created for each persona are going to be:

- Fictional name
- Fictional portrait
- Age
- Location
- Tagline
- Short description of their life and habits
- Which channels are used to obtain information
- Three keywords in relation to ESN

All the personas are presented in form of a poster (Appendix 2) which is then to be hung in the office of ESN international to remind the importance of the personas on a daily basis.

A total of 10 personas were created while keeping in mind the descriptions laid out in the chapter 4.2. They outline the basic needs and pain points of the target groups in a personalised manner and should be considered at any time a new piece of content is being created. This will lead to a better tailored content for the target groups which is followed by greater reach and engagement among these groups. The personas names (as they will be referred to by these in the next chapter) are:

- Andrzej the oblivious
- Wei the scholar
- José the party boy
- Lindsay the explorer
- Mustafa the home-comer
- Emma van der Commissie
- Peter the businessman
- Ágnes the local
- Kostas the national
- Anna the international

## 4.4 Personas-based content strategy

When having the personas described, an outline of the communication strategy is created. Each chapter will include different examples of content per communication channel, and resources needed.

All the channels described in chapter 3.5 are considered with addition of several others coming up from the target group analysis and communicational channels used by the personas.

Every piece of content prepared needs to lead the user to one of the conversion goals. These can be grouped into several categories:

- Contacting a section through the “section finder tool”
- Subscribing to different newsletter categories (as mention hereinafter)
- Filling in a “Become a member form”

### 4.4.1 Website

The biggest issue missing in the website is a clear definition of what the organisation is doing and guidance for the user along the landing page. Majority of the target pages for the users—potential conversion points—are hidden in the menu. A user normally doesn’t explore the page through the menu items (Archer, 2015) and requires more guidance, especially when arriving to the landing page as the “stranger”.

Information on the website therefore **needs to be defined into clear logical blocks** which then take the user to the more content-rich sites and subsequently convert him or her. These blocks will correlate with the needs of the personas and **will shortly present a solution to their pain points** while inviting them to take an action of exploring that particular part of the website.

Almost all personas can benefit from the website and for clarity the content blocks are divided in relation to the specific personas. The identified blocks are:

- Andrzej the oblivious
  - Hero image, introduction to the organisation
- Wei the scholar
  - Size of the organisation and list of universities
- José the party boy
  - Highlights of the organisations activities, list of sections
- Lindsay the explorer
  - Highlights of the organisations activities, list of sections
- Mustafa the home-comer
  - Invitation to become a member of ESN

- Emma van der Commissie
  - Size of the organisation and research papers presented by ESN
- Peter the businessman
  - Size of the organisation and operating countries
- Ágnes the local, Kostas the national, Anna the international
  - Highlights of the organisation's activities, login for the internal member system

The omnipresent message for the website as a whole can be described as “We can help your mobility in any way you can imagine.” The landing page's sole purpose is to lead the users to the parts of the website that are relevant for them, the first level blocks being:

- Services for students
- Media
- Policy and advocacy
- ESN Projects
- External relations
- About the organisation

Based on the information shown above, the content blocks on the website were decided to be in the order they will be shown on the landing page:

- Hero image with introduction of the organisation
- Highlights from the network
- New blog articles
- Map with sections and facts about the network
- Research, policy and advocacy block
- Stories from the members

The benefit of this approach can easily be measured on changes to the Customer Flow diagram in Google Analytics. To better illustrate the structure of the website proposed a mock-up of the structure has been created:

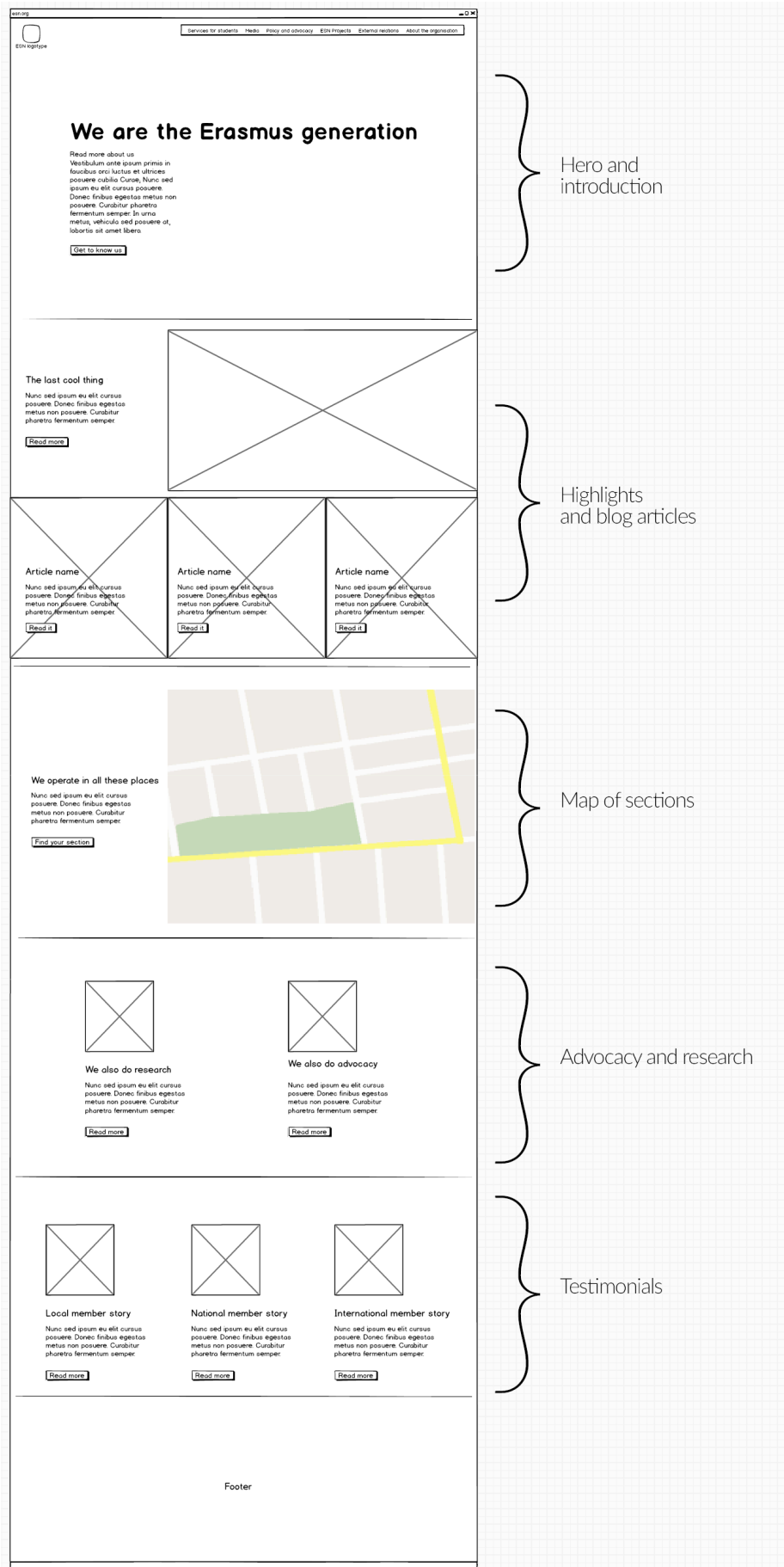


Figure 25: Proposed landing page architecture, author's findings

There is no budget created for this communication channel as the whole CPC and search advertisements are funded through the Google Ad Grants Program (Google, 2015). However there are certain limitations, the grant offers a daily budget of \$329 which is far beyond any possible budget of the organisation. All the resources to reconstruct the website can be taken from within the network. Depending on the scale of implementation of the changes (tailored changes only for the landing vs. complete redesign of the organisations CMS<sup>4</sup>) the time estimation is between 3 months and 1 year.

#### **4.4.2 Blog**

Directly related to the website changes is the rather radical change of the blogging/news part of the website. This at the moment only serves as a place for storing “news stories”, mostly of press-release character. Being aligned with the goal of becoming the voice of the Erasmus generation a fully implemented blogging platform is gravely needed.

The opportunities are ranging from sharing stories of Erasmus students and their experience with ESN to quick responses on policy making regarding mobility on the European level. The types of content are proposed in relation with the personas:

- Andrzej the oblivious
  - Lifestyle blog posts aiming at quality of mobile life
  - Importance and impact of mobility
- Wei the scholar
  - Dissemination of ESN’s research on universities, acceptance of credits acquired abroad, etc.
  - Mobility related professional posts (impact on employability)
  - Stories of students from specific universities
  - Introduction of different forms of mobility
- José the party boy
  - Highlight events happening around the network
  - Introduction of different sections
  - Preparation and assimilation tips (what to look for when getting accommodation, how to quickly learn a language, etc.)
- Lindsay the explorer

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<sup>4</sup> Content Management System

- Highlight events happening around the network
  - Travel tips
  - Introduction of different sections
  - Stories of exchange students being in the same position as her
- Mustafa the home-comer
  - Stories of Erasmus students coming home
  - Introduction of different forms of mobility
  - Stories from within the network
- Emma van der Commissie
  - Highlight events happening around the network
  - Dissemination of ESN's research on universities, acceptance of credits acquired abroad, etc.
  - Representation of the organisation on high-level meetings and conferences
- Peter the businessman
  - New partnerships being made
- Ágnes the local
  - Highlight events happening around the network
- Kostas the national
  - Different country introduction
  - Updates on the international projects
- Anna the international
  - Updates on the international projects
  - Behind-the-curtain types of posts, openly sharing the professional approach to the projects

All the blog posts need to be **tagged** with keywords (such as “research”, “story”, or “partners”) and a possibility to search by these keywords is to be implemented. On top of that every blog post needs to contain information about the author and a list of similar articles the reader might find interesting—commonly most popular posts from the same category.

Every blog post needs to **be written to answer to the needs and pain points of the targeted persona** and is to be created with conversion in mind—all the links present in the article need to lead the user to places where he or she can find more information provided by ESN in relation to the topic of the blog post.

An example of such blog post is given below:

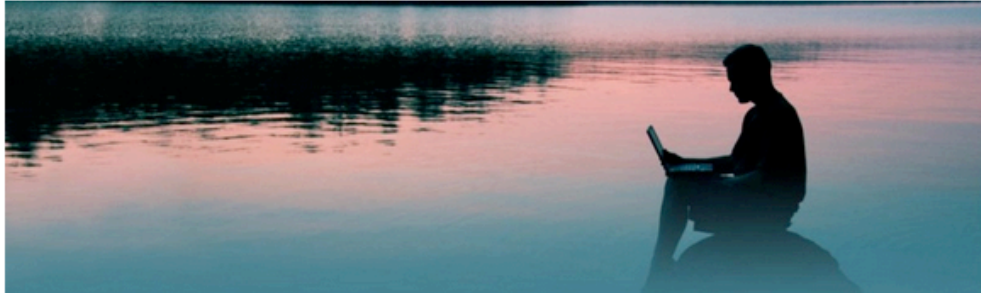


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STORIES



Jan Hruby  
Apr 30



## 10 ways how to sell your Erasmus experience in an interview

Being an Erasmus alumnus (an Eraslumnus if I may) makes you crazy valuable in the job market. Read on how to sell yourself.

[Read more](#) 9 min

♥ 129    💬 2

Figure 26: Example of proposed blog post, author's findings

The **expected blog post frequency is at least once a week** with different topic focus throughout the year, i.e. during the exchange programmes application period it is important to focus on the stories of exchange students (to convert the hesitant students represented by Wei the scholar) while during the summer period the focus can shift towards the travelling and preparation tips posts (to fulfil the needs of José the partyboy).

The blog is to be run by the ESN's Press Team, consisting of ~10 writers able to provide the required amount of articles. The produces articles are then published on the website and promoted through other communication channels to maximise their reach. The tone of voice for the blog **is rather informal and friendly** to engage the "student" personas.

The timeframe for setting up a running blog architecture is **estimated at 2 months** using the resources within the network.

### 4.4.3 Newsletter

As shown in the chapter 3.5.2 the newsletter in its current form reaches horrifying 0.6% CTR. This is caused by several aspects: The 2-stage process to get to the actual content of the article (the user needs to click in the email to get to the newsletter webpage), the absence of actual articles (all the content is presented in one long page which doesn't allow for tracking popularity of the content), the untailored approach to the content (the same newsletter is being sent to everyone) and to unfortunate implementation of the newsletter website (the content gets rewritten by new issue of the newsletter whilst the “old” one gets a new page created) which basically prevents any meaningful tracking.

The concept of a blog—as shown in chapter 4.4.2—is very closely related with the content of the newsletter. The proposed newsletter is **merely a shell being filled with articles from the website**. When given proper UTM<sup>5</sup> codes to link in the newsletter it is **easy to follow the traffic coming to the articles** and hence track the performance of the newsletter itself.

Since ESN is using its own server to send out the emails it is only a matter of **adding a tracking pixel** (Veilleux, 2014) to be able to see how many subscribers actually open and engage with the newsletter.

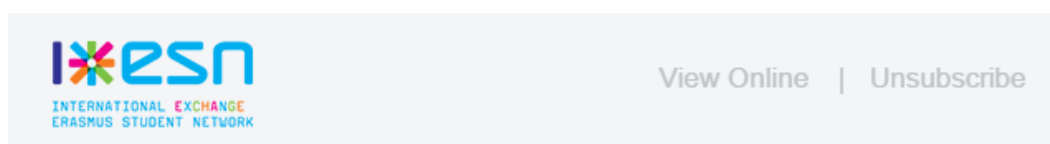
To solve the issue of tailored content, a newsletter is proposed to be split in student, partner, and ESN versions. To achieve this, corresponding CTA buttons need to be present on the website and in the blog posts, converting the users to become subscribers. The three categories contain following personas:

- Students
  - Andrzej the oblivious
  - Wei the scholar
  - José the party boy
  - Lindsay the explorer
  - Mustafa the home-comer
- Partners
  - Emma van der Commissie
  - Peter the businessman
- ESN
  - Ágnes the local
  - Kostas the national
  - Anna the international

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<sup>5</sup> Urchin Tracking Module

An example of such newsletter (targeted at the students) is shown below:



## What's the news in the network?



### 10 ways how to sell your Erasmus during an interview

Being an Erasmus alumnus (an Eraslumnus if you want) makes you crazy valuable on the job market.



### The memories of Spain - it's not always a fiesta

My time in Spain was nothing like I ever imagined. And yet it was even more amazing!



### What to write in a motivation letter?

How to amaze the university coordinators?



### The Spanish grant problem

The statement of ESN on the current development in Spain



### ESNsurvey2015 results

Are you a typical Erasmus student?

Figure 27: Proposed newsletter mockup, author's findings

The newsletter is traditionally prepared by the organisation's Communication Manager with help of members of the ESN Promotions Team. Its tone is **formal but personal**.

The redesigning the whole concept of the newsletter will require joint forces of several members of the ESN Communication Committee and its timeframe is **estimated at 2 months after establishing the blog platform**.

#### 4.4.4 Facebook

The most successful communication channel should remain targeted informally at students. Due to its reach and engagement it is a logical choice for sharing all the content produced for other communication channels to support it. There are however possibilities on how to include the Facebook communication in alignment with the conversion goals specified in the chapter 4.4.

The overarching goal in constructing a Facebook post is **to aim for comments and shares** as these are considered to be the most valuable by the Facebook algorithm. It is also important to **focus on content generated by ESN** to ensure the user flow towards the conversion goals, although an occasional share of an external content can add variety.

The possible content categories mostly overlap with those of the blog. Considering the personas and the specifics of the channel, these categories are:

- Andrzej the oblivious
  - Motivational posts about mobility lifestyle
- Wei the scholar
  - Informational posts about mobility lifestyle
  - Articles about different universities
  - Testimonials from mobile students
- José the party boy
  - Travel tips and hints
  - Interesting ESN events happening around the network (targeted at the region)
  - Motivational posts about mobility lifestyle
- Lindsay the explorer
  - Stories from exchange students
  - Travel tips
  - Community building posts
- Mustafa the home-comer
  - Stories of Erasmus students coming home
  - Posts about coming back home
  - Nostalgia-inducing posts
- Emma van der Commissie
  - Backstage content from conferences and summits
- Peter the businessman
  - Current partners promotion
- Ágnes the local, Kostas the national, Anna the international

- Highlight photos of what is happening around the network
- International project promotion (from the professional perspective)

A successful Facebook needs to be constructed from a tagline to catch attention, no more than two paragraphs of text (to make sure the following is visible), and a **clear CTA with a trackable link** (minified with a personalised bitly, such as “bit.ly/MobilityLifestyle”. The media content of the post can vary from photos and articles to videos and other. It is always valuable to tag partners and relevant subjects mentioned in the post as this raises the probability that the post will get shared by them.

To ensure balanced coverage of all the target groups, **a posting schedule needs to be created**. The weekly posting schedule should be supported by several long-run campaigns, which can for example focus on showing the personal side of the network—sharing short stories of the members of the network. The posts are to be prepared in advance and released based on the schedule.

An example of the weekly posting schedule is shown below:

| DAY       | TARGET PERSONA         | CAMPAIGN                  | CONTENT                         |
|-----------|------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Monday    | Wei the scholar        | ESNs survey dissemination | 1 interesting fact              |
| Tuesday   | José the party boy     | Summer tips               | 10 tips on meeting foreigners   |
| Wednesday | Emma van der Commissie | -                         | Photo from a conference         |
| Friday    | Peter the businessman  | Partner obligations       | Sharing the student offer       |
| Saturday  | Ágnes the local        | #THISisESN                | Photo from an interesting event |
| Sunday    | Anna the international | -                         | Project milestone               |

Figure 28: Posting schedule example, author's findings

While the current posting schedule is already pretty crowded, the option for **regionally-targeted posts** offers more flexibility in sharing interesting content from the network only to the relevant fans—fans in that region.

An example of a Facebook post targeted at Mustafa the home-comer is given below:

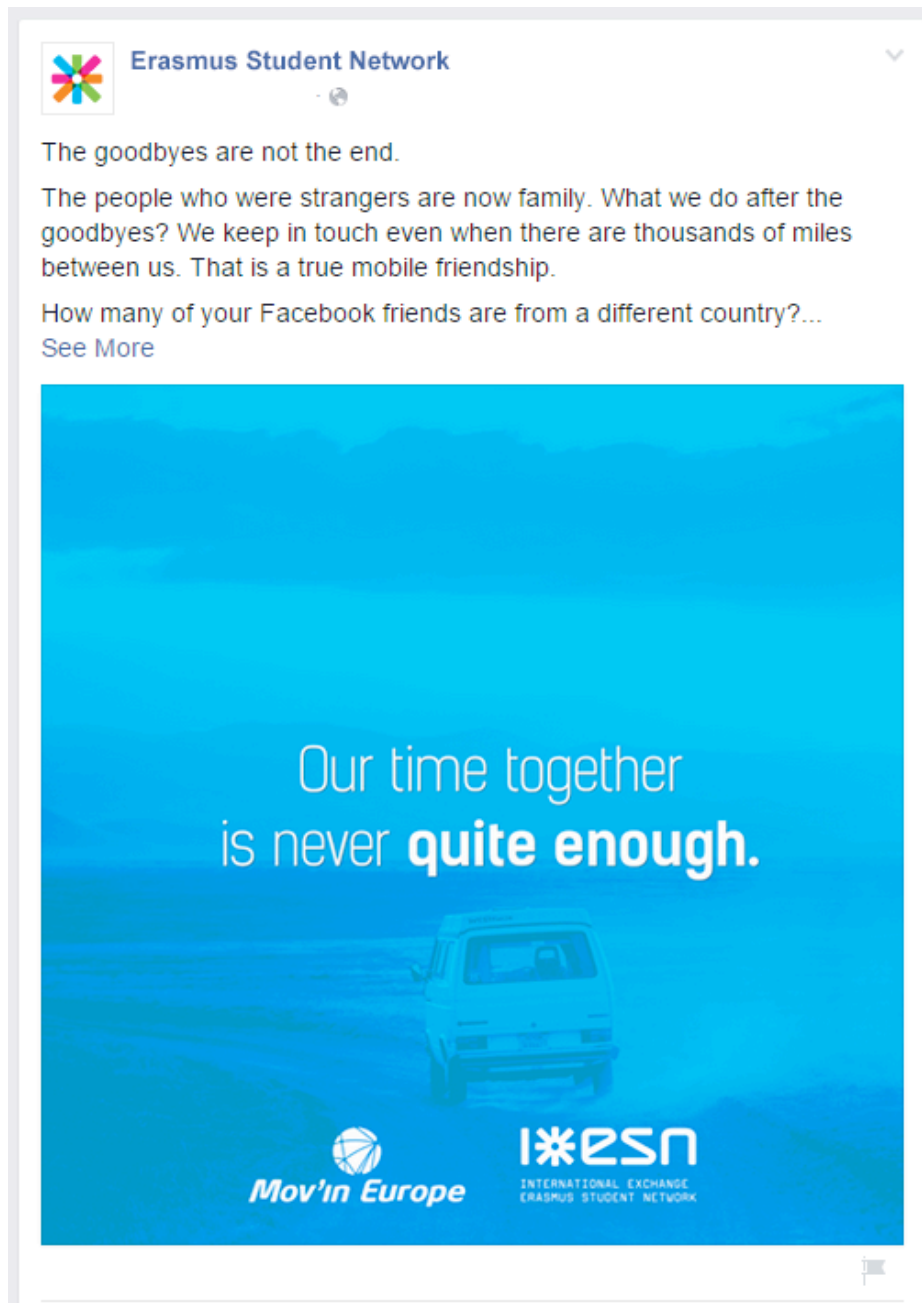


Figure 29: Example Facebook post, author's findings

The Facebook channel is handled by Communication Manager in cooperation with the Communication and Media Inter. For the campaign approach mentioned above the ESN Social Media Team is of a great help with developing the concepts and preparing the materials.

#### 4.4.5 Twitter

The 140-character communication tools shows its power when communicating with government officials and journalists where it is properly targeted already. The biggest improvement can be done with the frequency of the tweets. An average of 5–20 tweets per month is nearly not enough, especially when majority of them are focused on simple announcements and don't engage the audience.

The student personas are completely left out for this communication channel and the **focus is put directly on the government and commercial partner** personas with an overhang for the ESNer<sup>6</sup> groups.

The biggest benefit of Twitter is hidden in the tweets extremely short time span. **Life-tweeting from important events is currently a standard** in ESN (a very successful approach) but it is only used during the events themselves. These tweets (i.e. quotes from big name speakers during events ESN is a part of) are performing very well and this approach would be beneficial also outside of the events. Sharing posts on a daily basis from the day-to-day operations will bring the personal factor to the communication and will show the work of the international level not only to the potential partners but also to the whole network.

It is also crucial **to keep a close eye on all the mentions** of ESN, not only of the handle @esn\_int but also on all the relevant hashtags (e.g. #THISisESN being the established hashtag for the network's activities, #EAIE2015 as an example of an upcoming event, and #mobility for general tweets about mobility exchanges). Retweets and starting public conversations with users sharing relevant and interesting content, are the best tools in order to engage them.

An example of a proposed tweet is shown below:

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<sup>6</sup> Member of ESN





Figure 30: Example tweet, author's findings

Apart from Twitter-specific content described above it is also a great channel to share all other content created within the network, multimedia or text-wise.

The Twitter channel is handled by the Communication Manager with the help of the Communication and Media Intern and doesn't require any extra improvements.

#### 4.4.6 YouTube

The video content of ESN is currently in the state of renaissance, with “big movie” productions taking place. These videos commonly take several months to produce and their impact is questionable. The content created should be focused rather on longer-impact, smaller scale projects in the direction of video blogs which don't take that long to realise and actually answer to the needs of the personas.

An example of such video project can be an informational video about Eduk8—explaining the trainings and personal development project of ESN—which took almost 8 months to get to its final stage and when finally produced it gathered staggering 478 views. Whilst informing the viewers is undoubtedly needed, a trade-off between the time and resources spent in production and outcome of the video.



A proposed approach to the video content has its roots in the needs of the target groups:

- Andrzej the oblivious
  - Life of a foreigner moving to a different country
- Wei the scholar
  - Video testimonials of previous Erasmus students
  - Step-by-step instructional videos on how to apply to the programmes
- José the party boy
  - Movies about the Erasmus spirit, featuring ESN
  - Motivational mobility videos
  - Erasmus tips and hints
- Lindsay the explorer
  - What are students in other cities doing
  - Inspiration for activities from other students
- Mustafa the home-comer
  - Emotional videos tapping into the feeling of nostalgia
- Emma van der Commissie
  - Informational videos about ESN's activities
- Peter the businessman
  - Showing ESN as a trusted partner
  - Videos about cooperation with other partners
- Ágnes the local, Kostas the national, Anna the international
  - Inspiration about possible events
  - Videos showing what ESN means to other ESNers

Whilst the current numbers show that the target audience prefers the motivational type of videos and the proposed strategy is going in direction of a vlogging format, it is also important that the informational videos are still needed. A video of such format might not gain much traction in the online world but can go a long way when shown during a meeting to a potential partner.

To further engage with the audience a **series of videos on “How to get ready for Erasmus” is proposed**, starting from the very beginning with getting to know what exchange mobility is and describing the whole process from the perspective of several people. Videos shouldn't be longer than 2 minutes and should include the people talking in a relaxed environment while having cuts to the actual activities they are describing. By splitting the videos into very short vlogs the attention of the viewers is kept, the viewers are invited to propose their

own topics that should be covered, and the team can publish more products in shorter periods of time.

All the videos are produced within the network by the ESN Video Team, a group of passionate volunteers which grows and gets more professional with every year. The budget of the video team allows the members of the teams to travel to locations to take the required and planned for footage which is then used in the videos.

#### 4.4.7 Instagram

The content strategy for Instagram can be summarised as “highlights of ESN”. With no specific targeting on personas, **any interesting activity happening within the network should be shared** with a little backstory and link to the original creator. Monitoring the network’s activity on Instagram and other channels can be a great source of content for this communication channel.

Of course any piece of content shared by the account of ESN international should focus on fulfilling the conversion goal and needs to offer a clear way for the users to continue on the website of ESN international and channels of the original poster.

#### 4.4.8 Pinterest

First of the new proposed channels is Pinterest. Originally starting as an image scrapbooking tool, the “Rich pins” feature offers interesting ways of collecting content. Its proposed way of usage is two-fold:

Firstly, **gathering content created by ESN into categories** that relate to the student personas and can easily be accessed in logical blocks. As a collating tool, all the content—regardless of whether it is a photo, an article, or a video—can be put onto themed boards and allow for easy access to content from the same category. This will be beneficial not only for the external target groups but also for the ESNers, giving them overview of all the network is producing when it comes to its communication channels.

Secondly, to give more variety to the content in the categories, external content categories—such as interesting articles mentioning mobility not only made by ESN, or articles mentioning ESN—should be introduced. This is aimed at balancing out the amount of ESN-generated content in all the other categories and also fulfils the needs of Emma van der Commissie and Peter the businessman.

The conversion of this communication tool is fairly simple—to bring the users to the other communication channels upon expanding the pins.

On the resources level maintaining the account doesn't require extra manpower, a single person—possibly from the ESN Social Media Team—could set up and maintain the whole platform. Implementation-wise this is also rather fast to set into motion, setting up the specific goals and categories **shouldn't take more than a month.**

#### 4.4.9 9gag

9gag offers an interesting and cheap way of spreading content created by the network to masses of people provided it becomes viral on the site. As there no fixed rules for virality, it is beneficial to focus on the motivational and inspirational pieces of content (especially for the student personas) and periodically post them on the site. **The important part is that the posts can't be obviously branded** and can't be posted from an official ESN channel.

The community of 9gag is very keen on the genuine factor of the posts and that the posts are created by real people. The proposed approach is hence to post the selected pieces of content from different accounts with an accompanying message of “Oh look what I found”.

The 9gag strategy doesn't follow any specific conversion goals and is used only for brand awareness purposes. It also doesn't need any extra resources, the same person mentioned in the previous chapter can also take care of reposting the posts on 9gag.

#### 4.4.10 Reddit

The specifics of Reddit is that the community around it is split into immense amount of categories—called subreddits—with each having a specific topic. The general size of the user base is reaching 200 million unique users a month.

There is an Erasmus subreddit established with decent activity happening. . The personas targeted at Reddit are the student personas and the approach to Reddit **should be the experience and storytelling.** Motivating members of ESN to be active and answer can bring great value to the students asking the questions in there. The activity should come from the members of the community and only requires one member to act as a moderator on the subreddit.

## 4.5 Implementation

The proposed changes are **to be implemented in the period September 2015 – July 2016**. The resources needed for the implementation are of personnel character since the project is given zero monetary resources. From the perspective of management and creative direction, the changes are going to require efforts from the following positions:

- Communication Manager – 20h/week
- Chair of Communication Committee – 15h/week
- Vice-Chair for Media – 10h/week
- Vice-Chair for Branding – 10h/week
- Communication and Media Intern – 10h/week

The specific changes for the communication channels are going to require the following on top of the numbers shown above:

- Facebook
  - Content creator for Facebook – 5h/week
- Twitter
  - Content creator for Twitter – 5h/week
- Newsletter
  - Newsletter coordinator – 5h/week
  - Content creator for newsletter – 5h/week
- Blog
  - Press Team Coordinator – 10h/week
  - IT responsible – 5h/week until the platform is set up
  - 5 copywriters – 5h/week
- YouTube
  - Video Team Coordinator – 10h/week
  - 4 video makers – 5h/week
- Instagram
  - No extra resources needed
- Pinterest
  - Content Team Coordinator – 5h/week
- Reddit
  - Content Team Coordinator – 2h/week
- 9gag
  - Content Team Coordinator – 1h/week

## 4.6 Benefits of the proposal

Overall the proposal aims at bringing more tailored content for each of the used communication channels and introduces three more. The biggest benefit of implementing the proposed changes would be increasing the engagement of the targeted groups, stimulating them in communication with the company, sharing their parts of the story, and establishing a personal connection with them.

On performance side, all **the conversion goals for the different communication channels are measurable**—the person responsible will perfectly know where exactly is the traffic coming from, which campaigns and posts perform well and which need to be optimised. All this allows for effective reallocation of the resources based on the data gathered from the tracking and analytics, whilst having an overview of the general success of the strategy implemented.

Since there is no budget given for the content strategy every proposal has been calculated with zero monetary resources. Although there are many possibilities with creating targeted ads on different platforms and retargeting the visitors in different stages of their user journey, these need to be implemented in the next step when a budget line is established for this part of the organisation's communications. **Success of the proposed changes is considered to be the first building block towards the future budget line.**

The biggest benefit however is **bringing all the content creation into a streamlined system where the personas are taken into account at every single step.** This should strengthen ESN's position on the market of NGOs dealing with mobility and would be a great step towards becoming the one-stop-shop for mobility and the voice of the Erasmus generation.

## Conclusion

Due to its ever-growing nature, the Erasmus Student Network has always tackled the issue of its communication strategy in a learning-by-doing basis. This thesis is the first ever attempt on unifying all the efforts done in the field of communications by the organisation and should also mark the beginning of a transformation towards a performance-driven content creation.

The created personas allow for a quick and easy understanding of the target groups, their needs and pain points, and are made in a personalised manner to promote a natural and seamless integration of them in the daily decision making and the content creation process.

The communication channels in use have been reviewed from the point of view of these personas and the proposed changes align with the identified needs and pain points. It is crucial that all the content for the future is created while having these aspects in mind to avoid wasting resources on projects that will have very little impact.

All the communication channels changes are proposed with several conversion goals included which allow for effectively measuring the performance of the content among the targeted groups. The budget limitations (absence of a dedicated budget line) were met and all of the changes are implementable using the resources from within the network.

The author is leading a team of 60 communication experts as a Chair of the ESN Communication Committee in 2015/2016 and will personally oversee implementation of the proposed changes.

The objective of the thesis, i.e. “to clarify the communication strategy of the organisation focusing on content strategy, accommodating the needs of the stakeholders by using the personas approach” has therefore been met. While this is just first out of many steps to improve the communication strategy of ESN, the goal of “*Becoming the voice of the Erasmus generation*” is one step closer.

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## **Appendixes**

### **Appendix 1: Interviews**

#### **Interview with Lucia Benedikovičová, president of ISC VUT Brno 2015/2016 (local level)**

##### **What kind of information are the section members most interested from the international level?**

To be honest majority of regular section members are not very interested about information from international level. Members who are more connected to ESN as whole network are usually interested about information of ESN projects and materials at disposal. ComCom is great source of materials which are usually presented to members as attractive videos, graphics and other promo that can be used towards Erasmus students as well as motivation for members and recruitment and members always enjoy all these things which can be also considered as information. Nowadays are favourite FB groups that are used as great source of information and many members liked ESN international groups so they receive also some info from there - so I suppose that the most liked posts are the most interesting.

##### **What do they miss the most in regard of information provided?**

It is really hard to say. This would be great question for section research form. From my point of view information which is presented well in form of nice graphics, photo or video is always better received than just some written words.

##### **Where do you think is the biggest pain point regarding the communication between local and international level?**

From my point of view it is disconnection between regular work of section member and international level. Of course it's up to president of section and other board members how are information provided and explained. Sometimes problem is only in usage of words such as usage of unexplained shortcuts or too much exhausting information. But still it is up to member how much he/she wishes to be involved in.

## **Interview with Markéta Běliková, president of ESN Czech Republic 2014/2015 (national level)**

### **What kind of information are the NBs most interested from the international level?**

We, as NB of ESN Czech Republic, are most interested from the international level of ESN about things what we really need to know (rules, international partners, finance situation, international events, IB election, Meet your colleague meetings, etc.) It should be also NB coordinator and network care team, but just because I am part of this team, we know something about it, otherwise not. Generally to say, what has direct effect to us. It's because we don't have a time to know everything. (It is still student organization, so we have also job, school duties, etc). If there is someone who needs to know more, he can. Also, there is NR, who can tell us everything with more details.

### **What do they miss the most in regard of information provided?**

It is more about how information are provided. In our network. You can find so many guidelines, cookbooks, folders with everything, wiki and etc. and it's really hard to be oriented in all those kind of information/regulations if you have your own as ESN country and you have to follow them. In my opinion, there should be something like welcome package with all necessary information for NB in the beginning of their mandate, what NB coordinator should send them to be sure, they will know everything important, because transition is mostly every year and you don't know, how good it was. So we are not missing anything right now, maybe just how members in international team were elected, because it is responsibility of IB members, but it is quite important also for us and sometimes we even don't know, who was candidate, we just know, who was elected and there are situation, where friends were elected, not the best person who fits to this position.

### **Where do you think is the biggest pain point regarding the communication between national and international level?**

As I mentioned in the first paragraph, the biggest pain point in the communication between national and international level is the time of ESN members. Mostly, in ESN, members are elected for just one year. So there are so many things what should be done and time runs very fast and when you can feel comfortable in your position, you are in half of your mandate. Also, for NB level is

of course more important their section, so if there is no time, they don't care about international level at all (as it is in the countries without NB or with less number of the sections).

## **Interview with Robert Banet, president of ESN Poland 2014/2015 (national level)**

### **What kind of information are the NBs most interested from the international level?**

The answer for this question would vary depending on the ESN Country - these with lower number of section have different expectations from these where there are 35 sections (+5 candidate sections) like in Poland. Moreover, the mindset also differs within countries. Basing on my experience and needs as the former Board member in ESN Poland Association I would say that we need the whole overview of the work from ESN AISBL provided in a clear and transparent way in relatively short e-mails. And from that what we find the most interesting are the things not only administrative that are useful or obligatory for the NB but these we would love to share with the whole Polish ESNers by forwarding to our e-mail group. By that I understand information attractive for them such as: registrations for international ESN events, open calls for various positions within the whole structure of 'ESN International', recruitment to Committees, ordering ESN hoodies, most important information about AGM, any candidacies or important news and many others.

### **What do they miss the most in regard of information provided?**

My feeling is that the biggest problem in communication with ESNers active on the local level is not the lack of the information from ESN AISBL but its big amount. If they are not involved 'higher' they usually do not have strong bonds with its work and very often do not read longer e-mails. Sometimes with the NB members it's similar - they do not read anything unless it requires registration for the AGM or even miss the most crucial information since they never read this kind of information. Summarizing, some of them miss the whole thing because of the sort of ignorance that is nevertheless understandable to some extent. They miss all the things mentioned below that bring the wide possibilities of personal development.

**Where do you think is the biggest pain point regarding the communication between national and international level?**

For the international-national levels in ESN I see some horizons for improvements in transparency. I am aware that I would know definitely less insight information if I do not have wide contacts - very often personal explanation brings much clarification to some issues. Another thing is that the group of most active NRs are discussing many issues internally, not always with the IB and other way round and then some outcomes are passed forward. Not always they report in a satisfactory way to their NBs and countries. Unfortunately, any best tools or a good will do not substitute the personal approach and direct contact.

**Interview with Marie Schneider, National Boards Coordinator 2014/2015 (international level)**

**What kind of information are the NBs most interested from the international level?**

Countries are mostly interested in grant, training and networking opportunities. In the end this means a combination of internal as well as external opportunities to develop skills further, share best practices and also improve the own national level.

**What do they miss the most in regard of information provided?**

I believe mostly transparency and guidance is missing.

Transparency include decisions that are taken on the international level that may e.g. include the strategies of projects, grant applications, choice of people for positions and teams. Also countries are rarely consulted. Usually decisions are made without involving the countries, brainstorming with them, gathering their input and opinion as well as feedback.

Then a second thing that is missing: guidance. Countries miss information on how to implement projects or how to communicate to their sections and stakeholders. Further they usually miss provided material. When making sure that the national level is trained on how to train the local level we can also make sure to strengthen ESN as a brand all over Europe by using the same resources.



**Where do you think is the biggest pain point regarding the communication between national and international level?**

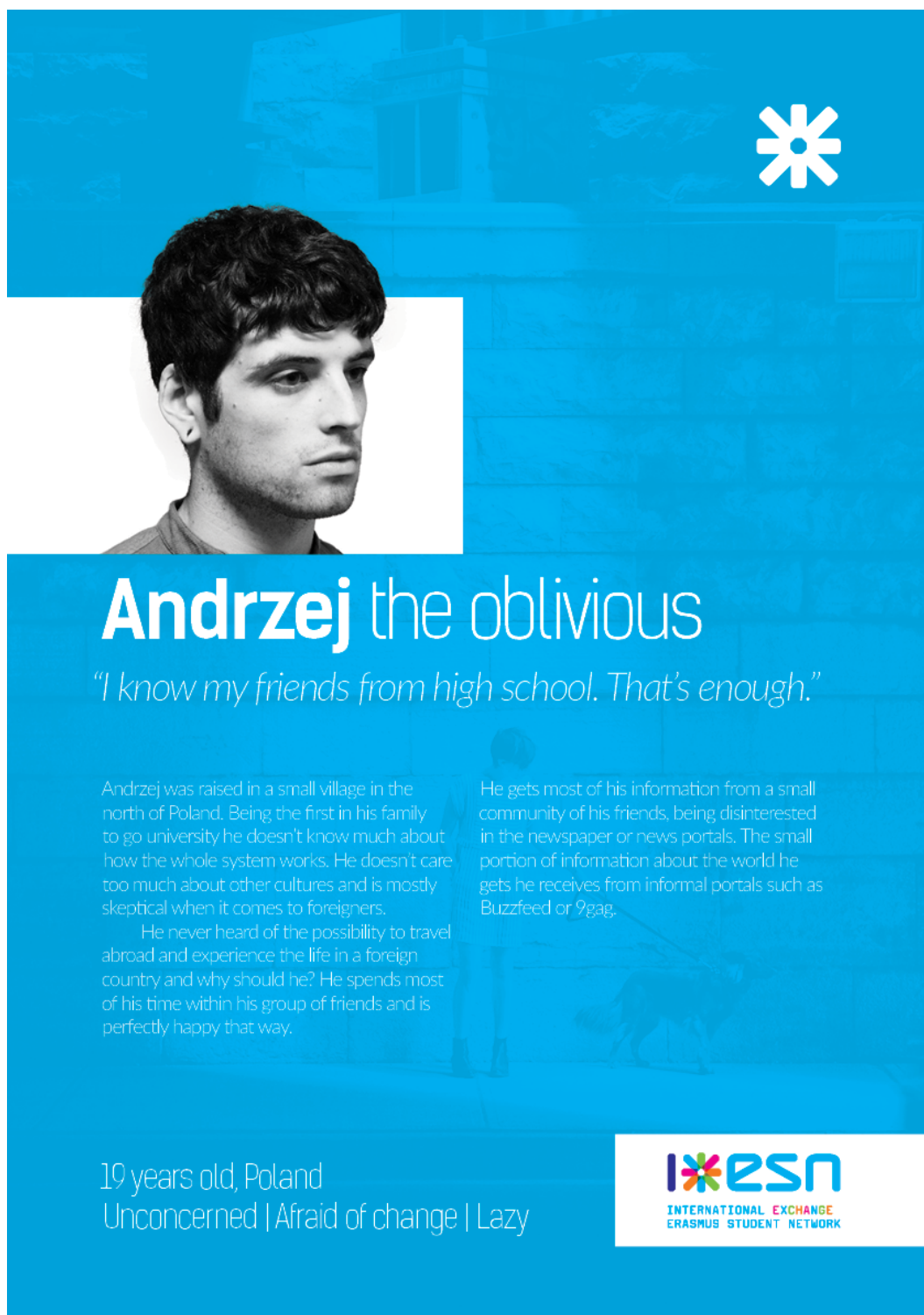
This is a very tricky question as I don't believe in only one pain point but several ones that combined lead to miscommunication.

First of all the perspective that we as individual have. This starts with the basic understanding what ESN is and should become in the future (voluntary vs. business approach) but continues also on the cultural level. Each of us has a different collective and cultural memory and therefor different behaviour and attitude. This is something we never really consider to be a problem even though it might actually be the case. We do not share a common ground and the same expectations and needs. A mutual understanding is simply missing.

Another crucial problem is time. We do not have time to really get on the same page, to discuss different perspectives. Usually at meetings time is limited and it follows the same routine. However, as each one learns and progresses information in a different way it is hard to make sure that everyone gets involved and also the involvement in discussions might lead back to this in a way. Further we do not make sure there is enough time planned for information to go from international to national and then to local level. The national level filters information and does not want to spam the local level. So in practice priorities need to be made and actually we also do not make use of buffer times too often which might proof useful to make sure there is enough time for consultations, discussions and implementation.

Then of course the communication between national and international level is mostly happening online and even if you have been lucky enough to have attended an international event the communication itself is very different to the one with the local sections (where you more or less know what's going on, you meet the people at every NP) and also the national level (where you skype regularly, meet in the best case regularly). On national level you can easier implement non-formal communication. However, with the international level it is more complicated.

## Appendix 2: Personas posters



# Andrzej the oblivious


*"I know my friends from high school. That's enough."*

Andrzej was raised in a small village in the north of Poland. Being the first in his family to go university he doesn't know much about how the whole system works. He doesn't care too much about other cultures and is mostly skeptical when it comes to foreigners.

He never heard of the possibility to travel abroad and experience the life in a foreign country and why should he? He spends most of his time within his group of friends and is perfectly happy that way.

He gets most of his information from a small community of his friends, being disinterested in the newspaper or news portals. The small portion of information about the world he gets he receives from informal portals such as BuzzFeed or 9gag.

19 years old, Poland  
Unconcerned | Afraid of change | Lazy



INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE  
ERASMUS STUDENT NETWORK



## Wei the scholar

*"I'm studying hard. I don't have time for that."*

Yu was born in the multicultural Netherlands to Taiwanese parents. Good education has always been of biggest importance in her family. Her parents are pushing on her to be the best students in her year and she values good grades over anything else.

Being raised in a country like the Netherlands she was always curious in how other cultures live. She heard about the Erasmus+ programme but most of her friends were telling her it's only about partying and drinking. What is the courses there won't be good enough? When she thinks about that experience she's also a little afraid. Living in a foreign country seems scary to her.

She likes to keep herself informed about the current issues in the world. Actively reading international news portals is important for her to get multiple perspectives on issues that are outside of her field of expertise.

Her trustworthy sources of information are portals like Forbes and Huffington Post.

21 years old, the Netherlands  
Concious | Analysing | Careful





## José the partyboy

*"I can't wait for my exchange to start."*

Born in Málaga, José quickly realised that getting to know new people makes him feel alive. He attends university mostly because of the people he can meet and boy, there is a lot of them. His university has lots of exchange students and he's used to them on a daily basis.

The Erasmus+ programme was an easy choice for him. He wanted to experience the feeling all of his friends were talking about. Starting next semester he can't wait what the world has prepared for him. He is super interested in all details and possible activities during his exchange even though it hasn't started yet. Where to travel and how to do it cheap? Where to live? How to meet people?

Always being in the hub of all that is happening around requires quite some research. And José always wants to know all the events around.

He spends his time browsing Facebook events in the surroundings and constantly sweeps Instagram to see pictures of all the cool places he could go to.

22 years old, Spain  
Cheerful | Social | Loud





## Lindsay the explorer

*"There are so many amazing places to see!"*

Since her childhood in western England, Lindsay always wanted to see the world. Being fascinated by different cultures, architecture, food, and experiences her Erasmus+ exchange is the best thing in the world.

While currently enjoying her exchange, she takes every possible chance to pack her suitcase and hit the road. There is just one issue, she doesn't have enough time to see all the places! And all the travel portals are in a language she doesn't know. She needs help from the locals to be pointed in the direction of the coolest spots around.

It's not only the places he gets to see (being an avid blogger always describing her travels) she is also in touch with a community of like-minded people to get to know the stories, tips, and experiences of others.

Where better to get this raw information than on Reddit and Tumblr!

20 years old, United Kingdom  
Curious | Restless | Adventurous







## Mustafa the home-comer

*"Woah. What to do next?"*

His Erasmus+ was the best experience ever! Before he left he couldn't even imagine how amazing the exchange would be making friends all over the world, traveling to countless cities, learning new languages and cultures. He came back as a completely new person.

However, the Post-Erasmus depression has hit him hard. He misses his international friends and all the good times he had with them. What to do next? He wishes he could experience the exchange once again. How to do that?

Missing his international family he tries to stay in touch with his new friends using any means possible. But in the meantime, his eyes are on the horizon of the next adventure.

Actively reading up on websites of the universities and the European Commission he looks for new opportunities. But these pages are so chaotic, it's so hard to find any information in there.

23 years old, Turkey  
Lonely | Determined | Nostalgic





# Emma van der Commissie

*“Erasmus is the essence of Europe.”*

After many years of working in the field of higher education Emma moved to Brussels to work for the European Commission. Actively fighting for the mobility programmes she is always keeping an eye on the student organisations dealing with mobility.

There is just one thing she is not sure about—aren't these students just partying and enjoying their life? Can they actually be considered as a valuable partner for the Commission's work?

Emma is traditional in a sense. She gets most of her updates in the form of newsletters and printed newspaper articles.

However, just recently she started to discover the power of Twitter. So many people are willing to discuss the topics she is passionate about!

46 years old, Belgium  
Traditional | Powerful | Concerned





## Peter the businessman

*"These Erasmus students are potential customers."*

Peter works for a big airline for several years now. As the industry is getting more and more competitive he is pushed to search for new ways to acquire new customers; he recently learned about the Erasmus+ programme.

So many young students are travelling every semester. They would make just perfect customers! If only he knew how to reach to them, there has to be a way.

What's better than a traditional meeting face-to-face? Even though he gets majority of the cold calls via email, nothing beats shaking the other person's hand, that's where the true character shows.

37 years old, Sweden  
Innovative | Driven | Open-minded







## Ágnes the local

*"I just love being in touch with the exchange students!"*

Being new in ESN and already hooked! Ágnes started as a mentor last semester and loved it so much she decided to become a full-time member. This semester she is responsible for organising two events and she is super excited about it, even though it's a lot of responsibility.

She doesn't know much about the ESN as a whole, all the information coming about projects she doesn't know anything about. Her main concern are her exchange students on her university, that's the most important part, isn't it?

Her main source of information is a section meeting, happening every two weeks. But there are always some topics discussed she doesn't understand too much, if only someone took the time and explained all those abbreviations to her.

23 years old, Hungary  
Caring | Inexperienced | Enthusiastic





## Kostas the national

*"It's time to get serious."*

After being in the local level for two years Kostas felt that he needs to take on another challenge. He run for the national board and now he is ready to develop his whole country with the knowledge and experience he brings from the hardworking local level.

There is just so much bureaucracy that needs to be dealt with. The projects are never done on time, no matter how hard he works. Sometimes he wishes he could go back to the local level, it so much easier there.

Kostas' best friend is his email account. A daily flood of emails starts in the very morning. Sections asking questions, international level announcing new projects and events, and the never-ending discussion with the rest of the national board.

He's just happy when he receives an email that is actually interesting for his position. Why doesn't it happen more often?

22 years old, Greece  
Excited | Overwhelmed | Disillusioned





## Anna the international

*"The network will only flourish in unity."*

The student life is almost over but ESN is still there. It has become a part of Anna's life. Currently working for a committee on the international level she puts all she has learnt over the years to practice for the whole network.

It's not always easy to work with the young inexperienced newbies but it's their energy and passion that keeps Anna going. Knowing that her work will enable a new generation of ESNers to grow.

It's the curse of the international level that she can't meet the people she works with face-to-face often enough. All the info coming in through emails and Skype calls. There could have been so much more done if everyone was aligned and knew what they were doing.

But wait, what are the other committees actually working on?

26 years old, Germany  
Skilled | Demanding | Stubborn

